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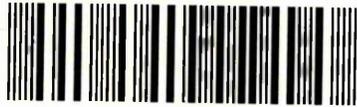
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Coming out and being a father: a qualitative study

Damien Fitzgerald

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirement of Sheffield Hallam
University for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

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Abstract

There is a substantial body of research exploring men identifying and coming out as gay. However, this is mainly focused on adolescents and young adults. Coming out is outlined by various models, which predominantly focus on the individual who identifies as gay and construct coming out as a discrete event that is completed. Similarly, there is a more limited body of research focused on gay parenting. However, the majority of research either focuses on lesbian mothers or uses quantitative approaches to identify deficits that children face due to having a gay parent. This study focuses on gay parenting in the context of how previously (heterosexually) married men who are fathers subsequently foregrounded their identity as a gay man. Data was collected using in-depth interviews to explore how these fathers constructed their identity as a gay man within the context of being a husband, ex-husband and father. The research utilises a Foucauldian discursive approach to analyse how 12 participants frame their practices and positions as a gay man and father and how this is managed within a heteronormative family context.

Initially participants drew on a heteronormative discourse to maintain a legitimate identity as a heterosexual man, husband and father. However, this required participants to constrain their gay identity. When fathers foregrounded a gay identity they justified this by drawing on a liberal humanist discourse. Foregrounding a gay identity as a father violated many of the heteronormative practices associated with being a father and this required ongoing negotiation by participants, their children and other family members. This required participants to continually negotiate the foregrounding and backgrounding of their gay identity to fit with expected practices as a father in varied social contexts. The conceptual implications of this for understanding the process of coming out, the experience of gay fathers and future research and practice are discussed.

Acknowledgments

I offer my sincere thanks to the fathers who participated in this study. They showed a willingness to discuss personal, and at times, painful, recollections of how they felt they would be perceived negatively by society based solely on their sexual identity. Without, their willingness to participate and share their accounts this study would not have been possible. It is through this willingness that injustices, can continue to be challenged. I am also grateful for the support of my supervisors, Sonja Ellis and Kathy Doherty, for their encouragement, continued support and understanding.

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CHAPTER ONE

1 The position of homosexuality: social, political and legal impacts

1.1 Introduction

Historically, those who identify as non-heterosexual have been positioned by legal, medical and political discourses as deviant, mentally ill and often as inferior to those who identify as heterosexual. This served to regulate actions and create social institutions that privilege heterosexuality and make those who identify as homosexual accountable for this position. Within this context, parents and the practice of parenting remain steeped in traditional heteronormative values, which associate good parenting with a heterosexual father and mother. While the majority of children are raised in heterosexual families the number of children raised by lesbian¹ and gay² parents has increased substantially. The way gay families are constructed also varies considerably. Research has been conducted with children raised with lesbian and gay parents but the majority has focused on lesbian mothers and research into parenting by gay fathers is sparse (Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013). Even sparser is research with fathers who parented children whilst in a heterosexual relationship/marriage but later foregrounded their identity as gay. Also much of the research that has been completed has tended to be from a deficit perspective – exploring the impact on children of how having a gay parent has been detrimental to them (Robinson and Brewster, 2013). As well as a deficit discourse around gay parenting there is also a discourse of normalcy – with heterosexual parenting positioned as the ‘norm’ - and consequently this positions gay parents as abnormal (Jones, 2010). The

¹ Lesbian refers to women who primarily identify as emotionally and sexually attracted to other women (Clarke, et al., 2010)

² Gay refers to men who primarily identify as emotionally and sexually attracted to other men (Clarke, et al., 2010)

impact of this is that constructs that are seen as normal (i.e. heterosexual parenting) need no explanation and are accepted, whereas those that are not (i.e. homosexual parenting) need explanation (Shotwell, 2012).

To address this, the current study is focused on men who parented within a heterosexual context and later publicly identified as gay. Gay men come to parenting in different ways, including adoption, fostering, co-parenting arrangements and surrogacy. However, these tend to apply to gay men who parent after identifying publicly as gay. There are a group of men, who conceive and father children in heterosexual relationships and then reposition their sexual identity as homosexual (a process commonly referred to as coming out). This challenges how power and knowledge interact to form dominant discourses and, 'achieve certain subject positions, subjectivities and ways of being' (Hanna, 2013, p.145), to construct dominant social and institutional practices of the father identity. Very little research has been conducted with this group of gay men who are parents, particularly to explore macro structures of parenting and how the practice of fathers, who later identify as gay, is constrained and made accountable by power that operates at broader societal locations and in different relations, such as families (Payne and Nicholls, 2010)

The process of identifying publicly as gay, coming out, has predominantly focused on men during adolescence and early adulthood. A number of models have been postulated that position coming out as a sequentially staged event with a number of stages (e.g. Cass, 1979; Brady and Busse, 1994). This sequential model approach is problematic for four reasons: not all men identify as gay during the adolescent period; they take limited account of the socio-cultural and historical context; they imply that until a person publicly identifies as gay, they are likely to have impaired psychological well-being; they position the process of coming out as an event that is completed. In the social world, where new interactions are continually occurring, values are continually being constructed and individuals are accountable for decisions, in the context of the place and

time they are made, this is problematic. Foucault captures this through the interaction of what he refers to as *technologies of power* (strategies operations and expectations that shape conduct) and *technologies of self* (aim for self-improvement through self-surveillance and self-discipline) to create ways of managing populations through self-regulation according to dominant social positions and identities (Foucault, 1998, Payne and Nicholls, 2010). The impact of these technologies of power and self on many men was to position their gay sexual identity as private and construct a public heterosexual sexual identity, that was salient with the historically and culturally situated practices of fathering children and parenting.

This study explores the historically constructed phenomena of men who parented in heterosexual relationships and went on to publicly identify as gay after they had children. The study also responds to the deficit approach evident in much past research by approaching the issue of gay fathering from a positive perspective, with the aim of understanding how men make meaning and manage the subject positions constructed from their father and sexual identities.

Claiming an identity as a gay father challenges the dominant constructions of parenting and families and this study explores how power impacts on how fathers manage and display agency in the repositioned identities as a gay man and father. The study addresses this by exploring how fathers negotiate the (re)positioning of their identities as a father and gay man within the social, political and cultural discourses that construct the dominant heterosexual expectations associated with families.

The socio-cultural environment has an impact on how homosexuality is positioned and this is also impacted by historical, legal and political positioning. The first chapter reviews the socio-political and academic positioning of homosexuality over time and how changes have challenged dominant discourses of family with the aim of achieving equality for those who do not identify as heterosexual. This is followed, in chapter two, by a review of research on

claiming a gay identity and gay parenting and presents the thesis rationale. The third chapter sets out the methodological framework for the study. Chapters four to six present an analysis addressing the questions outlined above. The final chapter presents the key findings and conclusions of the thesis.

1.2 Homosexuality and the socio-political climate

1.2.1 The socio-legal climate: the control of homosexuality

Over the past centuries there have been significant changes in Britain and the world at large. The socio-political and legal context is significant as this informs, restricts and promotes attitudes, morals, dominant discourses, rights and responsibilities of individuals within the society they live. For the majority of the population, who identify as heterosexual, this may have had little significance on their day-to-day lives. In contrast, for homosexual men, this context had the potential to disrupt, discriminate, incriminate, and in extreme cases, lead to death. Legislative changes relating to homosexual men generally attracted significant discussion but in addition to these changes setting out legal and policy positions there is clearly a complex interaction between the law and broader social attitudes. For homosexual men these broader social attitudes, which are constructed in interactions and attitudes in their day-to-day lives with family, friends, colleagues and others, often had the most significant impact on their sense of self-identity and value (Smith et al., 2004; Clarke and Peel, 2007a).

The negative positioning of homosexuality socio-culturally has a long history. Buggery (An English term, similar to sodomy, and referring to anal intercourse) first became illegal in Britain in 1533 under the rule of Henry VIII. In 1885, the Criminal Law Amendment Act through the Labouchere Amendment, made all homosexual acts illegal. However, individuals who challenged the homophobic position started to emerge. A notable early advocate for a variety of human rights issues in the early 20th century, including the defence of homosexual love, was Emma Goldman. Her supporters praised her free-thinking and radical approaches, while her detractors saw her public speeches and writing as inciting

violence. Nonetheless, she was notable as being one of the most prominent speakers to condone homosexual love (Chalberg, 1991; Goldman, 2006). During the 1930s and 40s the first signs of a more positive attitude towards male homosexuality emerged in some countries, although Britain was not among them. In the 1930s Poland, Denmark and Uruguay legislated to decriminalise homosexuality. This was followed by Iceland, Switzerland and Sweden in the 1940s.

The 1950s marked a significant period in Britain regarding the positioning of homosexuality by elected officials, the police and general public. Cabinet office documents confirm that there was a significant increase in homosexual offences, or as documents refer to the issue - 'unnatural offences'. Offences of sodomy and bestiality rose from 134 in 1938 to 670 in 1952. The same memo that outlined this increase, written by the secretary of state for the Home Department, drew out two further points: that treatment for homosexuality was often ineffective and; there was an increasing body of opinion that suggests criminalising homosexual activity was antiquated and did not fit with the ideas of the time and the stance of many other countries. As well as regulating individuals with legal discourse, homosexuality was classified as a mental illness (Drazenovich, 2012). This medical discourse of control led to debilitating treatments, including electric shock and drug therapy to convert or avert homosexual tendencies (Bayer, 1987; Spencer, 1995). In contrast to the points put forward in his memo, the Minister concluded that he did not see any reason for a change of law and effort should continue to be focused on treatment (Home Department, 1954). However, the conclusion was reached that there would be value in an enquiry into homosexuality and prostitution and this could be helpful for informing public opinion, which was seen as open to manipulation and sensational press reporting. It was noted that it could be difficult to find suitable members to be part of the enquiry panel and the potential that such an enquiry may come up with conclusions that could prove embarrassing to the

government. Namely, the potential to recommend a relaxation in the laws towards homosexual acts between men. In response to this the then Prime Minister suggested there should be encouragement for:

... a Private Member to introduce in the House of Commons, under the ten-minute rule, a Bill designed to prohibit the publication of detailed information of criminal prosecutions for homosexual offences (Cabinet Meeting, 17th March 1954A, p. 156)

This is significant as it confirms, even in the face of compelling evidence, policy and legislative decisions are affected by government and public opinion. The arguments put forward to support this view were around press freedom, making it clear that although homosexual activity is a criminal offence, the press were likely to become more focal in calls for an enquiry into homosexual practices (Home Department, 1954). A further meeting of the cabinet accepted this argument and agreed that the Home Secretary could proceed with appointing a Departmental Committee, rather than a Royal Commission, to undertake an inquiry into homosexuality and prostitution (Cabinet Meeting, 1954B). The Home Secretary appointed the committee under Sir John Wolfenden in 1954.

The Wolfenden committee was made up of 14 members and included representation from the judiciary, medicine, law, religious ministries and Members of Parliament. It included three women members (Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, 1957). The report of the committee was published three years later in 1957 and made a number of recommendations on homosexuality and prostitution. The most contentious recommendation was that homosexual acts between consenting men over the age of 21 in private should no longer be viewed as a criminal offence. All members of the committee, except James Adair, a Procurator-Fiscal in Scotland, agreed with the recommendation. Adair's arguments against supporting the recommendation were based on preserving the moral fabric of Britain after two lengthy wars and

his observations were included in the final write-up of the report (Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, 1957). In 1958 Anthony Dyson, an English literature academic, wrote a letter to the Times newspaper supporting the recommendations of the report and this was countersigned by a number of distinguished individuals including a past Prime Minister, politicians, religious ministers, a criminologist, biologist and philosopher (Dyson, 1958). This letter led to the formation of the Homosexual Law Reform Society (HLRS) and the Albany Trust and both contributed to the campaign for acceptance of the reforms put forward by the Wolfenden Committee. Again an insight into the social context of the time is provided by the apprehension among members of the society in 1963, for making Anthony Grey the secretary, as he was living with his male partner and there was concern that this could lead to the same type of negative police attention the society was campaigning to stop (David, 1997). A notable advancement with the establishment of these organisations was a campaigning voice for the decriminalisation of homosexuality.

There was no progress on legislative reform until 1965 when the Sexual Offences Bill was finally put before Parliament to enact the recommendation on decriminalising homosexual activity, but progress remained slow (Grey, 1992). The 1964 general election had only secured the Labour Government a very small majority. Following another General Election in 1966, that secured a much larger majority, the Bill received Royal Assent, under the Labour Government under Harold Wilson (Childs, 2001). The Sexual Offences Act (1967) partly decriminalised homosexual activity between two men in private, as long as both were at least 21 years old. However, a number of concerns were raised about the Act. As well as criticism of the Act on the grounds of unequal treatment in terms of the age of consent (the heterosexual age of consent was 16), the definition of private (usually equating to a bedroom behind a locked front door) left the actions of men engaging in same-sex sexual acts open to prosecution. For example, a hotel room was not seen as private, nor was a house that contained a

third person even if the two men engaged in sexual activity were in a bedroom behind a locked door (Fish, 2007). In addition, this legal change did not apply in Scotland or Northern Ireland or to those serving in the Merchant Navy or armed forces. Tatchell (1992) claimed that following the Act more men than ever were prosecuted for homosexual acts taking place outside of private spaces, a position supported by Bedell (2007). Even with legislative change same-sex sexual acts were still regulated and controlled by heteronormative institutions (e.g. law, police). Even with the change, men who identified publicly as gay were open to less favourable treatment, discrimination and potentially imprisonment.

1.2.2 The socio-legal climate: the emergence of gay rights

Even though there had been political and legal advances supportive of homosexuality the socio-cultural environment remained challenging. A significant event in 1969 in New York was the Stonewall riots, which occurred after the authorities started closing down the city's gay bars in response to right wing campaigning. The riots started as a series of spontaneous violent demonstrations in response to a police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar located in the Greenwich Village district of the city. This was seen as a key point for the homosexual community starting to fight back against the social and political system that had persecuted sexual minorities for decades (Weeks, 1989). This period was referred to as a turning point for the gay rights movement worldwide (Carter, 2004). The riots were also the catalyst for the formation of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). The first group of the GLF formed in New York and started in Britain in the 1970s. The main purpose of the GLF was to fight discrimination and promote equality with the aim of opposing individuals and organisations that oppressed homosexuals. The 1970s and 80s saw further advances in the attitude of organisations, political parties and individuals which helped to ensure continuing progress towards equality for homosexual men, albeit at a slow pace. There was also an increase in the number of countries decriminalising homosexuality. This included Austria, Costa Rico, Finland (1971),

Norway (1972) and Malta (1973) (McLoughlin, 1996; Ottosson, 2006). In 1973 the American Psychological Association (APA) also removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. However, this step did not offer categorical support for gay men as it was replaced by another category – sexual orientation disturbance. This can be seen as sitting between the view that identifying as homosexual is part of normal sexual variation and seeing homosexuality as a mental illness (Spitzer, 1981).

It was not until 1980 that Scotland decriminalised homosexuality by the passing of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act and again the age of consent was set at 21 (Waites, 2005). In Northern Ireland it was only after a ruling in the European Commission of Human Rights, in a case brought by Jeffrey Dudgeon after he had been interrogated by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (the Police force at the time) about his sexual practices. At the time in Northern Ireland it was not unusual for the homes of suspected gay men to be raided under the pretence of provisions in the Misuse of Drugs Act (1971). The European Commission ruled his complaint as admissible and it was passed to the European Court of Human Rights. They ruled that Northern Ireland's criminalisation of homosexuality contravened Article Eight (right to privacy) of the European Convention of Human Rights, which had been in force since 1953. The positive judgment was not universal with four judges dissenting. One of the judges, Judge Walsh of Ireland, argued that the law did not make homosexuality illegal, just homo-sexual acts. Based on this he was clearly arguing that if homosexual men led a celibate life they would not become a victim of the law. This case is notable for two reasons: it was the first successful outcome for a case related to gay rights and; in 1982 it led to homosexuality being decriminalised in Northern Ireland. There continued to be legislative advances with France lowering the age of consent for homosexual sex to 15, equal to that for heterosexual sex, and in 1988 Sweden became the first country to pass laws offering protection to homosexuals from discrimination on the grounds of social services, taxes and inheritance. These advances are notable

as they laid the basis for positioning of a gay sexual identity and constructing technologies of power that made a subject position as a gay man more acceptable in social institutions (Payne and Nicholls, 2010).

Even with legislative advances in the 1980s there were two important issues that contributed to the negative positioning of homosexuality: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) emerged and; Section 28 was enacted in Britain. AIDS, which became a worldwide issue, was originally known as Gay Related Immune Deficiency (GRID) or more negatively as the 'gay plague', placing accountability on men who had sex with men for spreading disease. There were suggestions that the response from authorities to the first cases displayed incompetence and apathy and that this was a factor in the early fast rate of spread. Overarching this was the claim that homophobia at organisational and political levels led to a much slower response to this emerging health crisis based on the fact that the primary affected population were gay men (Shilts, 1987). Over time awareness grew that HIV/AIDS could infect any sexually active person and did not discriminate on the grounds of sexuality. This went some way to reducing the idea of HIV/AIDS as a 'gay disease' but it is questionable whether this stigma may ever be fully dispelled (Shilts, 1987; Harden, 2012).

In Britain, the Local Government Act (1988) contained a number of sections and covered a broad range of areas. However, the most notorious section for the Gay community was Section 28 - prohibition on promoting homosexuality by teaching or by publishing material. The legislation was based on concerns that left-wing councils were indoctrinating young children (Jeffrey-Poulter, 1991). The introduction of Section 28 galvanised action in the gay community and a number of organisations, including Stonewall, were founded to campaign against what was seen as an offensive and discriminatory piece of legislation (Stonewall, 2010). A number concerns were created by section 28, including: the notion that homosexuals were dangerous to children; the government sanctioned homophobia; the Act offered a legal basis to oppose homosexuality and; gave

weight to the notion that homosexuality could be promoted. The section was finally repealed in Scotland, under the devolved parliament in 2000 and in the rest of mainland Britain in 2003 (Local Government Act, 2003). The abolition of section 28 also positioned the Labour Government as challenging the institutional heteronormativity of 1980s right wing conservatism (Durham, 1994).

1.2.3 Socio-legal attitudes: families, gay parenting and equality

Even though male homosexuality was decriminalised in England and Wales in 1967 the unequal age of consent (21 for homosexual sex compared to 16 for heterosexual sex) remained. The first attempt to address this was a parliamentary vote in 1994; however, it failed with 309 against and 282 for the change. A second vote to reduce the age of consent to 18 was successful, with 429 in favour, compared to 164 votes against (Hansard, 1994). In 1997 a young gay man took a case to the European Commission for Human Rights (ECHR) and argued that the unequal age of consent infringed his human rights. The commission ruled that the unequal age of consent was discriminatory and violated articles 8 (respect for a right to privacy and family life) and 14 (prohibition of discrimination) of his human rights (ECHR, 2001). Another vote took place in 1998 to equalise the age of consent at 16 and this time was carried with a large majority (Hansard, 1998). However, there were several defeats in the House of Lords to prevent the change (Hansard 1999a; Hansard 1999b; Waites, 2000). In 2000, the Government eventually invoked the Parliament Acts to overrule the House of Lords and the age of consent, after 6 years of votes, was eventually equalised by the passage of the Sexual Offence (Amendment) Act 2000 (Hansard, 2000). This was a significant legislative change as it placed homosexual men on an equal footing with heterosexuals. This change signalled a clear shift to achieving equality rather than tackling discrimination.

Another step for equality between heterosexual and homosexual relationships came with the Civil Partnership Act (2004). Unusually, the Civil Partnership Act

(2004) covered all four jurisdictions of the United Kingdom as there was agreement between the English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland legislatures. The Act was important as it provided rights and responsibilities identical to marriage, such as income tax regulations, rights to social security support and pensions, next-of-kin decisions. However, the introduction of civil partnerships was not universally welcomed by the gay community based on arguments that every person should have a right to marry, rather than form a partnership as enshrined under Article 12 (right to marry and found a family) of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR, 2001). The right for same-sex couples to marry in the United Kingdom was challenged by the case of Wilkinson and Kitzinger, two women who were married in Canada in 2003. The couple, both resident in the United Kingdom, took their case to the High Court in 2006. The judgment agreed that the couple had been discriminated against relative to a heterosexual couple, but that this did not amount to a contravention of their rights under the European Convention and that any discrimination was justified to protect the longstanding notion of marriage as being between a man and a woman with its implicit aim of procreating and rearing children. This highlights that the 'promise of rights did not translate into legal reality' (Harding, p. 16) and positions same-sex couples as not fitting the definition of a family.

The issue of gay marriage has been positioned at the heart of many social, legal and political institutions in Western countries of the world over recent years (Moscowitz, 2013). In 2013, the American Supreme Court made two significant rulings related to gay equality for families. In states that allow same-sex marriage they ruled that federal benefits for married citizens should be extended to same-sex couples - striking down the Defence of Marriage Act, (Botelho, 2013). They also declined to make a judgement in a case brought to the court about the legality of same-sex marriages in California, which by default sanctioned same-sex marriages in the state. The later ruling is particularly significant as it also laid the basis for challenges in states that ban same-sex marriage (Liptak, 2013). This

highlights the complex interactions between social, political and legislative change, and even though public opinion is more positive towards gay people (Zernike, 2009) long-standing traditions, such as marriage, are often still seen as being too threatening to conventions that are perceived as contributing to the moral fabric of society (Kanotz, 1998; Jowett, 2014).

By 2014 over a dozen countries and over 30 states in the United States have legalised same-sex marriage, including England and Wales in 2013 (Masci, Sciupac and Lipka, 2013; CNN, 2014). The Marriage (same-sex couples) Act (2013) legalised same-sex civil marriages in England and Wales and in Scotland from 2014 (BBC News, 2014a). Separate votes took place in the devolved assembly in Northern Ireland in 2013 and 2014, but the motion was rejected for the third time (BBC News, 2014b). There is speculation that if legislation is not passed in the near future there will be a legal challenge based on differential treatment across states of the same territory (Spedding, 2013). Throughout Europe the level of legal recognition of same-sex relationships varies from no recognition to registered partnerships (with different meanings in different jurisdictions) to marriage. By 2014 ten countries in Europe had marriage equality between same and different sex couples and further advances are expected, although the majority of European countries still have no recognition for same-sex couples (ILGA, 2014). Lannutti (2005) argues that this distinction is important as many countries are moving towards recognition of same-sex relationships by reproducing the powerful social construction of heterosexual partnerships for gay and lesbian citizens, which are dominated by historically situated gender and identity norms. However, culturally symbolic events, which it seems reasonable to describe marriage as, that exclude certain groups, is oppressive (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 2004). The queer approach to issues of equality is often seen as being purely deconstructive but this is too simplistic. For example some queer theorists argue that marriage is,

a negatively traditional, a means of exclusionary participation in citizenships that are problematic by virtue of their relation to normalising institutions of power (Jones, 2010, p19).

There may well be validity in such arguments, and the power of patriarchal government in implementing forms of partnership for same-sex couples, that fall short of what is available to different-sex couples but each level of recognition offers potential to disrupt the 'binaries that stabilise heterosexuality, patriarchy and identity' (Jones, 2010, p8).

In addition to the legal recognition of relationships another key element of family life is parenting. The dominant view of family life and parenting was heterosexual with virtually no acknowledgement or recognition of same-sex parenting through much of the 20th century (Lynch, 2005). Gay parents were present but they were generally invisible in constructions of families (Paige, 2005). This particularly applied to gay men who became a parent, as this was seen as an anomaly, as children required a mother-figure, positioning men as not able to parent without a woman (Robinson and Brewster, 2013). The view was often perpetuated in custody decisions, which favoured custody of a heterosexual parent rather than a homosexual parent (Allen and Burrell, 1996; Hale, 2011). This is based on claims such as, male and female parents are central for the healthy development of children, that children raised by homosexual parents are more at risk of issues such as drug abuse, experiencing domestic violence and later chronic illness (Marks, 2012). The impact of this was to prevent same-sex parenting, restrict it to one parent in a same-sex couple, or restrict the parental rights of gay parents. During the early part of the 1990s this view was perpetuated by the United Kingdom government's attitude that 'equal or gay rights' had no place in fostering or adoption (Department of Health, 1990). Claims were made that marriage was still the best environment for children to be brought up (Home Office, 1998), yet at the time marriage was not available to same-sex couples.

Hicks (2006) identified three dominant discourses that featured in the social work assessments of gay men who applied to adopt or foster children. Firstly, they were seen as maternal and/or feminine, secondly as perverted and a sexual risk to the children or thirdly, as presenting problematic gender models for children's development. This highlights that legislation has a place in challenging discrimination and creating an equal society, but, the dominant discourses and social institutions also impact on what is seen as acceptable (Hanna, 2013). This situation was finally challenged in Britain with the enactment of the Adoption and Children Act (2002). The Act, which took full effect in 2005, set out to provide an overarching adoption framework. For the first time this allowed same-sex couples to apply to adopt children jointly (Government Equalities Office, 2009). There was a misconception that this Act laid the basis for gay men to foster and adopt. However, gay men had never been barred from adopting but could only do so as an individual (rather than with a partner) and this often led to them hiding their sexual orientation because of the fear of negative reactions from social workers (Hicks, 2005).

Leading up to the full implementation in 2005 of the Adoption and Children Act (2002) there was evidence of a move towards equality. This included a more systematic competency based model of assessment for prospective parents that did not make sexual identity a core part of assessment; an increase in the number of gay parents approved for adoption; an increase in the number of support groups for prospective gay parents and; evidence of good quality anti-discriminatory practice. However, concerns remained that there continued to be stigmatisation of prospective gay parents (Hicks, 2005). In contrast leading up to the Act saw continuing prejudices towards gay fostering and adoption, including views gay and lesbian parents would be damaging to children and that married couples should continue to have priority in adoption cases. However, views were expressed that it would be acceptable to place some children, such as those with disabilities, with gay or lesbian parents (Hicks, 2005). Although the law brought

advances for gay men who were or wanted to be parents, hostility continued to perpetuate the idea that being gay and a parent was damaging to children. The Daily Express, a national newspaper, carried the headline, 'scandal of gay dads: how could couple be allowed to adopt three little children?' (Baron, 2004). The headline implied that the parents were intent on harming the children, particularly given their young age, an assertion based solely on the sexual orientation of their parents.

Other legislative changes also supported equality and access to parenting for gay men. The equality acts of 2006 and 2010 made sexual orientation and marriage/civil partnership a protected characteristic (a characteristic that may be seen as differentiating them from others). This gave equal access to services and employment and prevented discrimination in the provision of services on the grounds of a protected characteristic. The legislation applied to direct discrimination (less favourable treatment because of a protected characteristic); indirect discrimination (action leading to disadvantage for a group with a protected characteristic) and; associate discrimination (direct discrimination because a person associates with another person who possesses a protected characteristic). This has particular relevance for gay parents as it prohibited discrimination in terms of access to and the practice of parenting (e.g. fostering and adoption services; paternity and adoption leave). The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act (2008) gave legal rights to same-sex parents who conceived their child through assisted reproduction techniques to both be recognised as legal parents. For men (and women) who parented through a surrogacy arrangement, the Act enabled both parents to apply for parenting orders to gain legal recognition as a parent. These legislative changes were significant for gay men who wanted to/were parents as rather than using the law to challenge discrimination that had occurred; it signalled a shift into preventing discrimination to proactively promoting equality. Overall, the major political and social changes have had a positive impact on inclusion of gay people, however

marginalisation still exists as integration of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) community often equates to being treated like heterosexuals (Ellis, 2007).

1.3 Challenging heteronormativity and promoting social justice

Early psychological approaches focused on the psychology of sex but not on sexual identities, ignoring the modern construction of the homosexual subject (Plummer, 1995; Clarke and Peel, 2007). Much of the research in the mid to late 20th century focused on positivist approaches and pathologised homosexuality. The epistemological position of positivist research served to legitimise and preserve dominant positions and through this create a natural order. For sexual identity this legitimised heterosexuality and positioned homosexuality as a deviant practice. The impact of this was to position heterosexuality as the unified objective reality and homosexuality as a sickness and homosexuals as needing treatment (Plummer, 1975). Kinsey challenged this by moving away from a pathologising approach to homosexuality by positioning the sexuality of all men and women as a continuum, rather than a static concept and with greater consideration of the social context (Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin, 1948). Over time further challenges to the pathologising approach emerged, which deconstructed fixed notions of identity. This reflects the move to post-modern questioning about objectivity, which sees meaning as multiple, dynamic and always shifting (Gamson, 2000). Epstein (1996) supports this approach and states,

*Sexual meanings, identities, and categories were
intersubjectively negotiated social and historical products
– that sexuality was, in a word constructed (p. 145)*

Foucault focused on the role of power to theorise resistance to heteronormativity and argued power is not just top-down - it circulates at all levels and as a result all people are both oppressors and oppressed (Heller,

1996). Power operates in both private and public spheres (e.g. within families; on sexual identity) and this move away from solely a grand notion of power is defined as the *micro-physics of power* (Hall, 1997).

Foucauldian theory challenges traditional psychological ideologies and draws on language to explore how discourse and power create dilemmas for occupying minority positions (Parker, 2013). Foucault argued that discourses are complex and multiple and this creates a way of thinking or state of knowledge at a particular point in time. He described this state of knowledge about a particular discourse as the *episteme*. When this knowledge refers to the same object, represent a political movement, an identity or common institution or practice they are described as belonging to the same *discursive formation* (Foucault, 1982). What becomes the dominant position of a phenomena (constructed by what people, groups, society think), the *discursive formation*, then sustains a *regime of truth*, a historical mechanism that produces discourses that function as the truth for specific times and places (Hall, 1997)). As Hall (1997) states whether or not something is true it starts to be seen as true and this has consequences. For example, if being gay is not seen as compatible with being a father and this knowledge is seen as the *truth*, this has consequences for fathers, their children and wider family members and for fathers who parented within a heterosexual marriage, their (ex)wife, and each becomes accountable for this *regime of truth*. However, the shift from *practices* to *individuals* created two positions for gay men to take up and this choice, even if only notional, can include multiple and contradictory discursive practices (Davies and Harré, 1990). Those who identify publicly as homosexual and are out and those who are silent about their homosexual identity and from this the notion of the *closet* emerged. The idea of the closet is significant as if some men are said to be 'out of the closet' for this binary to exist others must be 'in' *the closet* (Sedgwick, 1990; Weeks, 2011). Sedgwick (1990) positions the notion of the closet as a, 'defining structure for

gay oppression in this century' (p. 71), which supports Parker's (2013) view on the role of power in regulating social spaces and practices.

Burr (2003) argues that power usually rests with the majority and for the heterosexual – homosexual binary, the dominant gender and sexual identity discourses privilege heterosexuality. This positioning constructs the notion of 'other' – with one group seen positively and the other as not and this creates a hegemonic system with one group (e.g. heterosexuals) positioned as more dominant than the other (e.g. homosexuals) (Joseph, 2002). Foucauldian theory also views language as a system of representation and providing meaning for phenomena. However, Foucault focuses more specifically on how knowledge is produced from period to period. So the discursive formation of a homosexual man as a social subject is different in 2015 than in the 1960s (Weeks, 2012). In Britain, Foucault's approach became known as post-structuralism as it explicitly attempted to dismantle the dualism between society and the individual (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2007), however the social structure is where actions occur and becomes socially real, emphasising rules, relations and power in social practices (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009).

Power is significant in this project as it dictates what is valued, for example; theory over practice; objectivity over subjectivity; masculine over feminine; heterosexual over homosexual (Baxter, 2003). Subjects personify discourses and through this occupy subject-positions. Prior to the 19th century, the notion of a homosexual did not exist, but the emergence of a homosexual subject-position in the context of negative moral, medical, legal and gender discourses emphasised the minority status of homosexual men (and lesbian women) and consequent inferior position. This is significant as knowledge is linked to power and assumes authority as it is seen as the *truth*. The emergence of this truth is used to regulate people by constraining disciplines and practice by responding negatively to this 'deviant' behaviour. The purpose of negative discourses was to restrict individuals demonstrating this behaviour (i.e. homosexual men) and correct the

deviant behaviour (Hall, 1997). While this position has improved for gay men in the United Kingdom, the dominant discourses of parenting and family remain predominately heterosexual and this continues to marginalise gay fathers and families. Psychological approaches, which are traditionally grounded in positivist methods, often contribute to this marginalisation by focusing on deficits or problematising non-heterosexual identities. In response to this a gay-affirmative psychology approach emerged. This was initially through the paradigm of lesbian and gay psychology, which emerged in the 1970s in the United States of America in response to the heterosexism of mainstream psychology. This focused on tackling homophobia, promoting recognition of same-sex relationships and promoting political change to challenge oppression of those who identified as non-heterosexual (Coyle and Kitzinger, 2002) and established lesbian and gay psychology as a legitimate area for research in the United Kingdom (Clarke and Peel, 2007a). Since the 1980s the more affirmative approach has progressed from confirming the psychological health of those who identify as non-heterosexual to challenging heteronormative assumptions derived from essentialist theories that often pathologise homosexuality (Clarke et al., 2010).

Kitzinger (1987) discusses this with reference to liberal humanistic discourse, which challenges heteronormativity by seeing gay men as having equal worth and dignity along with those who identify as heterosexual. Liberal humanism is about personal autonomy and choices so identity labels, such as homosexual, are seen as dehumanising and it is argued that the focus should be on the individual rather than a sexual identity, which is just part of a person. The implications of a liberal humanistic approach to research constructs: homosexuality as normal; heterosexuality as similar to homosexuality; rejects the notion of homosexuality as a central personality principle; and rejects homosexuality as posing any 'threat to the nuclear family and society as we know it' (ibid. p. 45). While this acknowledges the uniqueness and rights of those who identify as gay and challenges pathologising approaches to homosexuality it ignores the power of

historical privileging of heterosexual institutions, which individuals are governed by and accountable to through social practices and dominant heteronormative discourses (Hall, 1997; Payne and Nicholls, 2010). The philosophical liberal humanistic approach, while problematic for its focus on the individual with limited acknowledgement of social context, challenged the prevailing pathologising of homosexuality and laid the basis for other inclusive approaches, which viewed sexual identity as a just part of a person's identity (Clarke et al., 2010).

In the United Kingdom there has been increasing visibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) psychology. This broad approach is about promoting inclusion of sexual minority groups, challenging heteronormativity and focus research on the positive aspects of non-heterosexual identities using diverse research methodologies (Richardson, 1981; Clarke and Peel, 2007c). LGBTQ psychology acknowledges sexuality but is much broader, focusing on areas such as discrimination, parenting and families. To understand this LGBTQ psychology, particularly in Britain, has made use of discourse analysis approaches (e.g. Foucauldian discourse analysis) as they enable the researcher to gain a sophisticated insight into how sexuality makes individuals subjects of power in the 'real' context of their social world (Hegarty, 2007). The move to LGBTQ psychology also takes account of other contexts, such as history, class and race, which are often ignored in research with lesbian and gay people (Clarke and Peel, 2007a). Queer theory sees sexual identity as limiting and as part of a regime to regulate individuals, which has links to the essentialist-social constructionist debate of sexuality. While it is impossible to resolve this it is acknowledged that sexuality has a biological basis and to a greater or lesser degree is socially constructed, which emphasises the reality of history and the socio-cultural environment (Clarke et al., 2010).

Some LGBTQ psychology utilises positivist methods but the majority of research in this area is within critical paradigms, utilising discursive theoretical and

analysis approaches using qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are particularly suitable as they enable an in-depth understanding from participants, for example in exploring how they make meaning of coming out in a heteronormative social context where normative discourses assume subjects are straight³ (Clarke and Peel, 2007; Hegarty, 2007; Clarke et al., 2010). Critical approaches focus on political constructions to promote deconstruction of identity categories that privilege heterosexuality and masculinity by gaining a description of a 'real' context and by doing so challenge essentialist accounts of homosexuality and identity (Clarke and Peel, 2007a; Langdridge, 2008), while avoiding an exclusive focus on language which, 'insulates researchers from critical engagement with the people that they study' (Hegarty, 2007, p. 53). LGBTQ psychology does not dismiss positivist approaches but over the past decades has clearly articulated the potential of critical psychology and qualitative methods to challenge social injustice often accepted by traditional psychological approaches and deconstruct the notion of 'other' to create a more inclusive society. Over recent years LGBTQ psychology has challenged the notion that full human rights should not be afforded to those with non-heterosexual identities with the aim of achieving social and cultural affirmation for all groups within society (Ellis, 1992; Clarke, Burgoyne and Burns, 2007; Wilkinson and Langlois, 2014).

1.4 Summary

The historical, political, social and cultural context created positions where heterosexuality has been privileged over homosexuality. However, over a period of time legal and social attitudes towards homosexuality have improved and for individuals with a non-heterosexual identity are positioned more equally alongside those who identify as heterosexual. However, the impact of negative historical constructions of homosexuality led some men to a position where

³ Straight is an abbreviated term for heterosexual and used to refer to men and women who are emotionally and sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex (Henry, 1941). In this study the term is used when referring to an individual or an individual identity.

privately they identified as gay but publicly as straight, causing dissonance in their sexual identity. A socio-cultural environment that is hostile to homosexuality impacts on societal constructions, such as family, friends, religion, and the work-place and in-turn this influenced how individuals who identify as gay position themselves in this social context.

Same-sex marriage and partnership issues, along with many other aspects of policy and legislation that impact on men who identify as gay clearly position sexual identity as a key factor in citizenship (Jones, 2010). Sexual identity is not solely confined to individuals but is constructed within society and individuals are made accountable for their identity positioning by socio-cultural expectations. This position is altering with legal recognition of same-sex relationships but this change has been relatively recent and the pace remains slow. This has had a positive impact on how homosexuality is socially recognised and accepted, however, there is still not universal acceptance of same-sex relationships. This is the case with regards to same-sex parenting, particularly parenting by gay men, which was seen to put children at risk of poorer developmental outcomes. This view was challenged with the passage of legislation, which laid a more equal legal basis for legal recognition of both parents in same-sex relationships. However, the passage of this legislation for same-sex couples was greeted with scepticism from parts of society. This confirms that positive legal change does not equate automatically to positive social change. Gay men parenting continues to challenge two dominant positions about 'good' parenting: that it requires heterosexual parents; secondly that children require a mother for successful development. The academic community has demonstrated increasing visibility of LGBTQ psychology, with increasing recognition and legitimacy for psychological research, which offers the potential to contribute to social justice. However, further dilemmas and tensions exist that need addressing to create a more inclusive academic focus, particularly for gay fathers, to enable them to benefit from politico-legal and social progress and be valued as legitimate parents.

Chapter two evaluates literature on identifying as gay and gay parenting. The process of claiming a gay sexual identity and how this is negotiated within the context of powerful social constructs, such as masculinity, and how this creates dominant expectations that position men as accountable if they violate heteronormative expectations. The social act of identifying as gay, referred to as coming out, needs to be managed by men within the socio-cultural context created by political and legislative changes that impact on how minority sexual-identities can be marginalised and excluded and this is discussed in chapter two. Being a gay parent makes the parent(s) and their families accountable for occupying a position that is contradictory to the dominant constructions of parenting and family life. The chapter critically discusses research on gay parenting, in particular the dearth of evidence on gay men as parents and how much of the research has been conducted from a deficit perspective. Chapter two also sets out the research questions and provides a rationale for the study.

CHAPTER TWO

2: Coming out: Claiming a gay identity

2.1 Introduction

Traditionally, identity was often defined from an essentialist perspective as fixed – suggesting stability over time and with little or no influence from social interactions. In response to this restrictive position theories emerged that positioned identity as formed through interactions and shifting rather than fixed (Woodward, 2004). Post-structuralist approaches position a person as having multiple identities (e.g. gender, sexual, group identities) and these are constantly amended (Turner and Reynolds, 2010). Issues of gender and sexuality are not separate from individual identity and society but integral to each (Frank, 1987). This emphasises the interactional nature of identity as it is formed through contact and interactions with others and this positions identity as a power laden concept, which constructs hegemonic ideals (Foucault, 1982; Donaldson, 1993). Identity also has political implications, as a person is held accountable for their identities, particularly if they are labelled as different (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008).

The previous chapter outlined how identities, including sexual identity, are constructed and influenced by historical, political, and legal discourses, and social interactions. Identity and masculinity are key social constructions that place expectations on individuals to meet heteronormative expectations. This chapter outlines the challenges of managing a private homosexual identity, alongside identifying publicly as heterosexual. A key aspect of constructing a public identity as a gay man involves negotiating the transition from an assumed heterosexual sexual identity to a homosexual sexual identity (Hurewitz and Harrison, 2012). This process is commonly known as coming out. This chapter critically discusses how coming out is outlined in theoretical models and how this

is negotiated alongside the social and cultural expectations outlined in the previous chapter and the accountability this places on men for violating heteronormative expectations. For gay men who are parents they also have to negotiate their parenting identity, which is predominately associated with identifying as straight. Heterosexually married fathers, who identify as gay, position their families as different to the majority and this makes families accountable for occupying a position that is historically, culturally, socially and politically laden in heterosexual expectations. A particular challenge for gay parented families is managing the coming out process and (re)positioning as a non-heterosexual family, a process that required the (re)construction of their identities and relationships with each other and the wider community. This is discussed with reference to research on constructing a position that challenges dominant heteronormative expectations of families.

2.2 Identity and hegemonic masculinity

Goffman (1969) focused on the presentation of self as theatrical performances where actors (individuals) aimed to maintain face in their interactions to achieve a positive self-concept. This is potentially a challenge for men who identify as gay, due to heteronormativity, constructing an expectation that men will be straight acting to validate their masculine performativity. This is often referred to as hegemonic masculinity and this version of male identity is constructed by exclusion of homosexuality (Weeks, 2012). Donaldson (1993) states that hegemonic masculinity is about winning and holding power as a social group and finding ways to legitimise and maintain this power in a way that appears natural. Hegemonic masculinity maintains the dominant position of men by placing power with them to maintain their social positions over women. In addition it places expectations on men to behave according to dominant forms of masculinity to maintain gender hierarchy and cultural constructions of masculinity (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Lusher and Robins, 2010). Masculine behaviour in men is commonly equated with heterosexuality and feminine

behaviour with homosexuality (Alexander, 2011). The dominant construction of male sexual identity is heterosexual and there is an expectation on boys to take up positions that reinforce hegemonic masculinity (Chapple, Kippax and Smith, 1998). In society men are accountable for digressing away from dominant masculine ideals (e.g. strong, powerful, dominant, masculine traits), and/or claiming a non-heterosexual sexual identity (Kahn, Goddard and Coy, 2012).

Hegemonic masculinity legitimises and maintains a masculine hierarchy, which privileges men who meet these ideals. However, masculinity is a complex concept. Connell (2005) outlines three constructions of masculinity: complicit, subordinated and marginalised. Complicit masculinity applies to men who do not embody the archetypes of hegemonic masculinity but still gain from male privilege. Subordinated masculinity applies to men who are excluded through cultural practices, such as identifying as gay. Marginalised masculinity is men who are subordinated by hegemonic masculinity because of their race or class (Connell, 2005). However, Wetherell and Edley (1999) argue that hegemonic masculinity does not account for conflicting discursive positions that can be taken up. A person does not necessarily construct their masculinity in the same way in every situation and that the context needs consideration. As Goffman (1969) argued it is performative and about performativity (Alexander, 2011). McCormack (2012) also critiques the notion of hegemonic masculinity and argues that there is not just one type of hegemony so a more nuanced approach is needed. Masculinity is often performed in public spaces and these spaces are constructed as heterosexual spaces. This heterosexual dominance serves to subtly police gay identities that are evident in these spaces (Brickwell, 2000). Hegemonic masculinity and homophobia are intrinsically linked, as the former sustains the construction of the latter to regulate masculine behaviours and expectation.

Anderson (2009) argues that hegemonic masculinity can be understood better when seen in the context of homophobia, which is defined as a cultural fear of

homosexuality. Homophobia is positioned as being affected by two factors: awareness that anyone can be gay (including masculine boys and men) and the level of cultural homophobia. Epstein (1997) argues for adolescents the notion of masculinity is built around a framework of compulsory heterosexuality and deviation from this position makes individuals accountable. Therefore, homosexuality, which is culturally and historically situated, impacts on the construction of masculinity and places expectations on boys and young men to meet dominant construction of maleness. This positions heterosexuality as the dominant sexual identity and maintains the construction of hegemonic masculinity, seeing a homosexual identity as subversive. Felmlee, Orzechowicz, and Fortes (2010) also argue that a homosexual identity is often seen as socially irresponsible with gay men characterised as self-indulgent and careless. Foucault argued historically this position is significant as it viewed homosexuality as a deviant sexual practice and unacceptable identity, serving to regulate sexual identity by prohibiting a gay sexual identity (Alexander, 2011; Drazenovich, 2012).

The impact of hegemonic masculinities is still evident for men who are parents, both straight and gay. There has been a change in social and cultural expectations towards fatherhood, rejecting the idea of a detached distant father and embracing the caring nurturing father. However, hegemonic views of masculinity, which prioritise the role of father as provider persist and this creates a tension between providing 'cash' to support the family and taking a caring role (Yarwood, 2011). Fathers are still often positioned as part-time and secondary parents, as mothers are seen as the primary caregiver (Wall and Arnold, 2007). This is explained by the need to provide for the family, but also reinforces the caring expectations on mothers and supports the social practice of mothering rather than parenting (e.g. mother and baby groups; changing rooms located inside female toilets). This has the potential to disempower all parents by: placing the majority of caring expectations on mothers (Magaraggia, 2012);

placing a providing expectation on fathers (Yarwood, 2011) and; positioning gay men as not able to provide either the care or nurturing required by children (Riggs, 2010). Men are beginning to carve out a new discourse of fathering and challenge the normative expectations of hegemonic masculinity, but this remains challenging (Henwood and Procter, 2003). Reconceptualising what being a father means has the potential to add to the social value of caring, but to achieve this all fathers need to avoid hiding, 'behind the many legitimate excuses provided by hegemonic masculinity' (Magaraggia, 2012, pp. 87 & 88). While there has been a cultural shift in the societal positioning of parenting, normative images of family and hegemonic masculinity continue to position gay fathers as inferior parents and limit access to the practice of parenting (Wall and Arnold, 2007; Riggs, 2010; Magaraggia, 2012).

2.3 Managing sexual identity

2.3.1 The challenge of constructing a homosexual identity

For much of the 19th and 20th century, as discussed in chapter one, the stigmatisation of homosexuality was unchallenged and formal recognition of this discrimination, through the term homophobic, only occurred in the 1970s (Herek, 2000; Ridge and Ziebland, 2011, Clark, 2012). This position is significant as claiming an identity as a homosexual positioned a man as abnormal, immoral, ill and potentially as engaging in illegal acts. Higgins (2004 and 2006) found that conformity to heterosexual ideals was more likely when individuals were from a small town; where there was low acceptance of homosexuality; where heterosexuality and marriage were seen as normal; had a desire for children and; where an individual was hoping to overcome homosexuality. Grever (2012), supports this, but also found that economic and professional considerations and religious bigotry as reasons for gay men entering marriage. The prevalence of heterosexual marriage among gay men is difficult to gauge precisely but it is estimated that up to 20% of men who identify as gay were previously married (Bozett, 1989; Tornello and Patterson, 2012). Plummer (1995) suggests that the

traditional family discourse, which is still present, can create secrecy, shame and guilt and this often leads to marriage to satisfy the heterosexual ideal position. From the 1970s the emergence of gay activism aimed to challenge these traditional discourses and remove stigmatisation of homosexuals by removing the dominance of the heterosexual - homosexual binary (Plummer, 1999; Clark, 2012). The resistance that started to emerge, '...in opposition to the repressive conformity of heteronormativity' (Portwood and Stacer, 2010) rejected the idea that heterosexuality is normal, and by default that homosexuality is abnormal. Frank (1987, p. 161) summarises the challenge caused by,

... patriarchal structures of heterosexist masculine authority, domination and control are diffused throughout society in its social, political, economic and ideological activities

This emphasises the power of masculinity in different cultures and how different forms of masculine behaviour are subsumed into a dominant form, where there is a silence around homophobia and heterosexism, which in-turn privileges heterosexuality and becomes the institutional norm. This position was maintained for much of the 20th century and only started to be challenged with the emergence of the gay liberation movement and academic work of gay theorists from the 1970s onwards (Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985). Claiming a public gay identity in the 1960s, 70s and 80s was different to claiming this identity more recently. Offerd (2005) reiterates that although homosexuality was positioned as a legal and valid sexual behaviour in the 1970s and opened a discursive space for gay men to be attracted to other men without fear of arrest or being seen as ill, challenges remained. Dominant values of sexual identity often equate with heterosexuality and as a result 'sexuality is a discourse, politics, practice, community and identity' (Offerd, 2005, p. 58) that is not equally inclusive of non-heterosexual identities.

2.3.2 Identifying as gay

During the latter part of the 20th century the term 'gay' emerged as being less pejorative and pathologising than homosexuality and became used as a term to describe both a homosexual identity and lifestyle (Weeks, 2012). Developing a sense of identity for gay men, where they are able to positively position themselves within society, is often referred to as being 'out' (Weeks, 2011). However, there has been limited research on, 'the acquisition of an integrated gay identity' (Halpin and Allen, 2004, p. 110) and much of the research that has been undertaken sees identity as static and associated with a poor psychological well-being (Halpin and Allen, *ibid*). Historically this is reinforced through an almost invisible acknowledgment of sexuality in the political, social and cultural environment. Sexual identity is usually ascribed to a sexual identity category (e.g., bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual, transgender,) and has political as well as personal meaning (Starles et al., 2009). There is generally an assumption of a heterosexual sexual identity (Rowen and Malcolm, 2002) and individuals who do not identify with dominant societal constructions (e.g. to have an opposite sex partner, meet masculine expectations, marry etc.) are held accountable for these positions. The decriminalisation and removal of homosexuality as a mental disorder did not automatically convey acceptance and legitimacy as Offerd (2005) argues non-heterosexual men remain 'perilously vulnerable to dominant powers and paranoid sexuality' (p. 58). The most obvious extreme negative reaction against gay men is often described as homophobia, which Weinberg (1972) defines as,

The fear by heterosexuals when in near proximity to homosexuals, and the self-hatred felt by gays because of their homosexuality (p. 4)

This definition is significant as it emphasises that homophobia can potentially be attributed to both external and internal factors. More recently, the term heterosexism has been utilised to show how taken-for-granted notions of

sexuality, that generally assume everybody must be heterosexual (Kitzinger, 2005). Ryan, Pearlmutter and Groza (2004) outline heterosexism as a bias that sees straight people as the 'norm' and gay individuals or families as inferior to other family forms (Herek, 2000; Vrangalova and Savin-Williams, 2012). It could be assumed that this is not problematic, but to do so leaves an individual with no option but to cross to a socially marginalised minority group (Saltzburg, 2007) and identify as gay.

Coming out is the term most widely used to denote an individual self-identifying as gay to themselves and others. It also assumes that each individual will be either gay or straight and 'out' or 'in'. A gay identity is different to other marginalised identities (i.e. disabled, minority-ethnic) as it emerges following assumed heterosexuality and forming a homosexual identity is often a secretive process, particularly in the early stages (Rowen and Malcolm, 2002). There is a common genre around coming out as emerging from a world of shadows, shame and guilt and bringing an identity from the private to public world. Discussion of forming a gay identity tends to focus on the coming out stage of identity formation and is often linked with an epiphany that creates a crucial turning point and raises consciousness of the potential to create a positive identity from negative experiences (Plummer, 1995). Socio-historically the process of coming out *was often proceeded by 'catastrophic fantasising'* (p. 59) about the reactions of others as it was associated with negative outcomes and a traumatic coming out reinforces a sense of difference, otherness and separateness from mainstream society (Grierson and Smith, 2005). A number of models have been put forward to explain the complicated process of an individual coming to terms with their sexual identity and taking on an identity as a gay man. The response to an individual coming out is unique to each person. The varied models focus on four broad stages: awareness of a potential gay identity, self-labelling, community involvement and disclosure and identity integration leading to formation of a coherent self-identity (Marszalek et al., 2004).

Cass (1979) devised a six stage model to explain the coming out process. The model moves from identity confusion, identity pride (which generally involves disclosure of a gay identity to others) and completes with identity synthesis when sexual identity is integrated holistically with sense-of-self, rather than sexual identity being seen as defining the whole sense of self (Greene and Britton, 2012). The linear process, suggesting a reductionist approach to the complex process of identity formation and the requirement of having to reach the final stage to position sexual identity as part of a holistic sense of self (Kaufman and Johnson, 2004). In addition the model suggests, by dichotomising sexual identity as either gay or straight, that an individual is either in or out. This presents the process of coming out as something that is discrete and dealt with as a one-off event. This model, as with many subsequent models, assumes that the integration of sexual with personal identity occurs in adolescence (Erikson, 1968; Rosario et al., 2001; King and Smith, 2004; Giertsen and Anderssen, 2007; Heatherington and Lavner, 2008).

Brady and Busse (1994) simplified Cass' model into a two stage process: the individual developing a coherent self-identity as homosexual and (equating to stages one to three); a sense of where they belong as homosexuals (equating to stages four to six). Similarly, Giertsen (1989) suggested a model of identity development based on two phases: identification and manifestation. The identification phase is the process of self-identification, acquiring meaning and sexual encounter. The manifestation phase is about moving from self-identification as gay to telling others and the formation of an intimate relationship. This model is similar to Markowe's (2002) two stage model of lesbian identity development: coming out to self and coming out to others. These models address the criticism levelled at linear models that assume either no identity prior to disclosure of sexual orientation or a starting point of heterosexuality. However, it could be questioned whether any of the models take enough account of social and socio-historical contexts (Giertsen and

Anderssen, 2007). This may be a particularly salient point for those individuals who do not 'come out' during adolescence or after life events traditionally associated with a straight identity, such as marriage.

D'Augelli (1994) outlined a six stage model to explain gay identity development that started from the position of recognising that an individuals' feelings and attractions are not heterosexual. In contrast to Cass, D'Augelli (ibid) saw the individual speaking about their gay identity at this point, but acknowledged a number of hurdles would need to be addressed to achieve fulfilment as a gay man, such as positive family relationships. A significant difference in this model is that it is not linear, but interactive, and the individual is likely to engage in many stages at once. However, the models have a commonality – the expectation that an individual has, 'a fixed, integrated gay or lesbian identity across all situations' (Dworkin, 2000, p. 163) and given the complexity and multifaceted nature of coming out this is potentially problematic. Dube (2000) addresses some of these criticisms by proposing a model that acknowledges both sexual behaviour in adolescence and self-identification of a gay identity. However, Dube (ibid) argues that there are two ways to identify as gay: following either a sex centred pathway; or an identity centred pathway. Men who follow a sex centred pathway come to a sense of self-identity through sex. With the identity centred pathway, self-identity comes from non-sexual contact so identity centred males can label themselves gay without engaging in sex with other men, a point supported by Schindhelm and Hospers (2004). Dube (2000) found that identity-centred males were significantly more likely to engage in sex with a female before a male and not view sex as a defining characteristic of their identity.

Alderson (2003) argues that constructing a gay-male identity has both development stages and process components and proposes an ecological model to explain this. The model proposes that to consolidate a gay-male identity three aspects need to be resolved: connection to self (e.g. own behaviour, parental and family influences); connection to the gay world (e.g. cultural awareness of

the gay community, social connections with other gay people); re-connection to the 'straight' world (e.g. achieving cognitive dissonance in own identity; integration with peers). This model differs from other models as the ecological element focuses on the importance of the environment in developing a salient identity, similar to other ecological models (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Heft, 2013; Zea, and Nakamura, 2014). Given the inter-related nature of an individual identifying as gay, their family environment, the historical context and wider socio-cultural environment the model by Alderson (2003) captures influences not apparent in earlier models.

As well as exploring identity development from a psychological development perspective, the challenges an individual may face in self-identifying as gay occur in a social and cultural context. This is significant for gay men as,

... heteronormative thinking assumes that heterosexuality is the indisputable and unquestionable bedrock of society; heterosexuality appears as a given – natural, coherent, fixed and universal (Yep, 2002, p. 163)

However, as discussed the notion of being 'in' the closet, where an individual does not publicly identify to others as gay sets up a dualism with being those who do identify publicly as gay and are 'out' (Sedgwick, 1990; Weeks, 2011) Ward and Winstanley (2005) raise two significant issues surrounding coming out. Can a gay man ever claim to be fully 'out'? The process of disclosure be seen as completed? The whole notion of coming out creates a dichotomous binary as the nature of being 'out' suggests something else is closeted (Sedgwick, 1990). New social interactions occur frequently and this brings new dilemmas: remain silent or foreground sexual identity and disclose. This raises the question of whether a gay man can ever be fully 'out' or 'in' to either themselves or others?

Kitzinger (2000) explains that heterosexual assumptions are regularly present in talk and often remain unquestioned and allow heterosexual privilege to continue

(Kitzinger, 2005; Langdridge, 2008). However, not all coming out revelations are designed to convey news, but are more about conveying information. This can be done to intentionally avoid flaunting a gay identity to avoid drawing attention to coming out and to downplay any 'shock value' in the revelation. The notion of coming out can also be seen as colluding with the idea that a person's sexual identity has been intentionally hidden and this positions them as being assumed to be straight unless it is announced otherwise. While models of coming out offer a theoretical understanding of the process, approaching coming out as a mundane act, where it is treated as any other information in a social interaction, rather than a revelation of news, can be used by speakers to downplay coming out. However, this approach can unintentionally collude with maintaining social order by accepting heteronormativity (Kitzinger, 2000). Utilising a mundane approach to foregrounding a gay identity, where coming out is not treated as a revelation or news, is a way to modify practices to avoid disrupting dominant heteronormative discourse but can allow heterosexual privilege to continue and undermine a gay identity (Bigner, 1999; Kitzinger, 2005; Langdridge, 2008; Greene and Britton, 2012).

2.3.3 Social expectations and identity categorisation

Since the late nineteenth century sexual identity has relied on three identity categorisations: homosexual, bisexual and heterosexual (Vrangalova and Savin-Williams, 2012) but this fails to recognise identity as a dynamic concept. The work of Kinsey was revolutionary in identifying sexual identity on a continuum, however the three category identities still predominate (Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin, 1948; Starles et al., 2009). The three categories are also unequal, with heteronormativity positioned as constituting power to construct discourses for sexual identity, masculinity, family and parenting producing notions of *truth* at a particular time (Fairclough 2001; Clarke et al., 2010). The impact of this was to make disclosure of a gay identity far less common for men born prior to the

1970s due to internalised homophobia and social stigmatisation (Rowen and Malcolm, 2002; Grierson and Smith, 2005; Wright and Perry, 2006).

Accepting a gay identity has two key challenges: to define and emotionally accept the identity and; to develop a network that is supportive of a gay identity. If social and cultural attitudes to homosexuality are negative and/or initial reactions coming out are negative, it is more likely that this will be internalised and impact negatively on the coming out and may delay or stop construction of a gay identity (Wright and Perry, 2006). A gay sexual identity may be suppressed by an individual because of gender or sexuality expectations and this may be often enacted through family, cultural, race, class or economic positions, where heterosexuality is positioned as accepted and homosexuality as deviant (Lovaas, Elia and Yep, 2012; Greene and Britton, 2012). This is significant as constructs that are seen as normative (e.g. heterosexuality) do not need definition, whereas constructs that are not positioned as normative (e.g. homosexuality), require explanation and bring accountability (Shotwell, 2012). On-going heterosexism and homophobia can lead to feelings of shame and internalised homophobia and undermine the establishment of a gay identity (Rowen and Malcolm, 2002; Wright and Perry, 2006; Greene and Britton, 2012). The dominant position of heterosexuality was premised on the notion of an essentialist *truth*, where there were assumptions that everyone was *straight* and if a person did not fit this construction they were marginalised. Many aspects of the social system are constructed along a gender binaried ontology of masculine and feminine and claiming a non-heterosexual identity requires a strong sense of self to disrupt hegemonic discourses of biology, sex and gender (Monro, 2007). Minton and Mattson (1998) state that for an individual to identify as homosexual requires a,

'...process of constructing a self-identity based on difference; that is, attempting to establish who they were as different from the cultural prescription of heterosexuality' (p. 58)

2.3.4 Identifying as gay as a heterosexually married man and father

One impact of homophobia and heteronormativity for men who identified privately as gay, particularly if they wanted to be a father, was to form heterosexual relationships, as this prevented men being categorised in the socially unacceptable group of homosexual (Drazenovich, 2012). This is evidenced by the finding that half of gay men who married had thought of themselves as gay/bisexual when they married (Higgins, 2006). Tornello and Patterson (2012), in a study focused on gay men who had heterosexually married, found that 70% suspected being gay before they married, but of these only 12% had disclosed to their wife. Reasons given for entering marriage were social acceptance, family pressure, desire for children and desire to be normal (Peterson, 2001). This supports the earlier findings of Higgins (2006) and confirms how pressure to meet dominant heterosexual ideals impacts on choices that (previously) married gay men make in terms of marriage and family. For men who identify as gay and marry, this immediately constructs an assumed heterosexual identity. However, this public identity has to be maintained, which is associated with higher levels of stress and reduced psychological well-being (Alessi, 2008; Tornello and Patterson, 2012).

Although there are a number of people who disclose their gay identity the research on later disclosure and particularly disclosure following marriage and fathering is limited. The disclosure of a homosexual identity may bring into question long held views on the place of marriage and societal expectations of fatherhood (Lewis, 2002; Treyger et al., 2008). If a husband comes out to his wife it may signal the end of their married relationship and separating is usually complex and lengthy (Grever, 2012; Tornello and Patterson, 2012). Married men who come out, have to manage tensions between potentially competing identities - their identity as a gay man, and their identities as a husband and father (Ben-Ari and Adler, 2010). Although estimates suggest that up to 2% of heterosexually married men identify as gay there is limited research about how

men manage the coming out process and the (re)construction of their sexual identity and family roles (Pearcey and Olsen, 2009; Ben-Ari and Adler, 2010).

Each family has to find ways to (re)construct their family post coming out (Binger, 1996). Dominant notions of marriage, family and heterosexuality still exist and married fathers who identify as gay are likely to be held accountable by their family and society for violating these expectations (Lynch, 2005). If parenting begins after their sexual identity is disclosed, this may be seen as an integral part of the family identity and not be seen as necessary to come out to children (Peterson, Butts and Deville, 2002), whereas if parenting has started when the father's sexual identity is not known, this may position disclosure as problematic (Power et al., 2012). Claiming a non-heterosexual identity is often met with prejudice and stigma and this can be particularly prevalent for those who are parents (Lynch, 2005). A review by Patterson (2000) found that children responded more positively to parental disclosure in childhood or late adolescence, but less positively during early adolescence. However, Tasker, Barrett and De Simone (2010) argue this is complex and is impacted by personal acceptance and the social context. The issue of disclosure can also be an important mediating factor in the amount of time fathers and children spend together, as children who do not know about their father's sexual identity tend to spend much less time with them (Miller 1979), which emphasises the need for a climate where fathers feel able to disclose to their children. Gay fathers who have disclosed their sexual identity are more likely to have stable lifestyles than those who have not (Bigner, 1999).

For married men who are fathers, their family will impact on their ability to assume a public gay identity and achieving what Cass (1979) refers to as identity synthesis - the ability to integrate sexual identity with other aspects of one's self (Malcolm, 2008). However, to achieve this, others around the person, including family members, need to be supportive and this may be more problematic for wives and children as assuming a gay sexual identity is seen as disrupting their

family. Developing a gay identity is also likely to take time, particularly for married men who may have contact with other men while still married. Taking account of this Malcolm (2008) puts forwards three propositions to account for married men who have sex with men. They may be fundamentally homosexual and acceptance of a homosexual identity will improve psychological well-being. Or, psychological adjustment may be promoted by compartmentalisation between their homoerotic interests and marriage. Or, homoerotic interests is pathologised, seen as negative or detrimental and needs to be abandoned. These positions, particularly the second and third, take an essentialist approach to identity and see it as a stable construct. It also requires men to attach themselves to one end of an identity binary and in the final proposition, positions a gay identity as negative, compared to a straight identity. This highlights the issue of identity formations and public disclosure as a particular issue for married men and emphasises the complexity between identity, sexual orientation and private/public behaviour (Malcom, 2008). This supports the position of Fassinger and Miller (1996) who attempt to separate the individual from their social world, but Malcolm (2008) argues that this distinction is artificial, as although there is a difference between self-acceptance of a 'homosexual desire' and public disclosure, the individual is immersed in their socio-cultural environment and has to manage this position.

Coming out is now more often seen as a life event that may take place over a long period of time (Ridge and Ziebland, 2011). A person can hold a self-concept as homosexual but this can be seen as their mental image of themselves. It does not require a social setting. In contrast, a sexual identity as homosexual is constructed and occurs socially and potentially against the backdrop of stigma (Troiden, 1989). For married men dominant social constructions are centred on a heterosexual relationship and family life. The dominant construction of family life envisages a strong husband who provides for his wife, who predominately cares for the children. Models that describe the coming out process make an

assumption that individuals are motivated and have the cultural resources to want and be able to *come-out* (Ridge and Ziebland, 2011). For married fathers self-identifying as gay and claiming a public identity as a gay man does not fit the dominant expectations of family life. Once men enter marriage and become fathers their family life is further segregated from an ability to claim a gay identity.

2.4 Gay parenting

2.4.1 The prevalence of non-heterosexual families

There is no currently available data for the United Kingdom on numbers of gay parents (Tasker, 2002), but there are no factors to suggest that the prevalence would be substantially different than for other European and North American countries (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Data from the United States census found that among partners living together, 1 in 9 are same sex couples (among a population of approximately 230 million). Of these, a third of female and 22% of male couples had at least one child under the age of eighteen living in the house (American Psychological Association, 2004). In the United States alone it is estimated that this equates to between 1-9 million children living, either permanently or as part of joint custody arrangements, with a gay parent (Perrin et al., 2002). This constituted a rise of approximately 80% from the previous census in the number of same-sex households and this seems likely to continue (Gates, 2012; Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013). The composition of gay families includes children conceived through assisted reproduction, adoption, foster, step-parent arrangements and children conceived in previous heterosexual relationships (Wells, 2011). Power et al. (2012) in a study of gay fathers found that those who parented in a heterosexual relationship (40%) face specific challenges related to managing coming out (e.g. repositioning their family identity; negotiating relationship with spouses).

More recent estimates suggest that 20-25% of gay men are fathers and Bigner (1999) describes this as a minority (being a gay man) within a minority (being a gay father), which can lead to isolation in the parenting and gay community (Dunne, 1999; Armesto, 2002; Bigner, 2004). There are three main pathways to gay men becoming fathers: heterosexual marriage and children; embarking on marriage when their partner is aware of their sexual identity; becoming a parent, through different means such as surrogacy, fostering or adoption or joint-parenting arrangements, as an openly gay man (Rickford, 1992; Bigner 1999). It is common for gay men not to know how to reconcile the biological and emotional needs to parent and they often doubt the appropriateness of their feelings to father (Shernoff 1996). Men who enter heterosexual marriage often delay the coming out process due to stigma or heterosexism (Bigner, 1999), which views hegemonic masculinity as the ideal standard for all men to attain and castigates any man who refuses to accept the dominant culture (Franklin, 1998). In a society with high levels of homophobia, this may partly explain why the majority of children to gay fathers were conceived within heterosexual marriage (Barrett and Tasker, 2001; Tornello and Patterson, 2012). However, a dearth of research around gay fathers remains (Peterson, Butts and Deville 2000; Armesto 2002; Patterson 2004b).

In the past, many prospective lesbian and gay parents have also been denied the right to become foster or adoptive parents because of their sexual orientation, which has also disrupted the lives of children in terms of access to their biological parent, or the chance of becoming a part of a stable and nurturing family (Laird 2003). During the 1990s, a number of American States started to shift towards a less judgemental approach to custody and access for lesbian and gay parents by requiring demonstration of potential harm to children before the sexual orientation of the non-heterosexual parent could be cited as an adverse factor (Patterson and Redding 1996). Perhaps more significant though is the fact that over 60% of United States agencies also accept adoption requests from

prospective lesbian and gay parents (Brodzinsky et al., 2002). Progress has also been made in European countries but remains slow. By the start of 2014 only 14 out of almost 50 countries allowed joint adoption, second-parent adoption or recognition of co-parents, the United Kingdom allowing all three (ILGA Europe, 2014).

2.4.2 Evaluating the efficacy of gay families

Over the past thirty years, an increasing body of literature has explored issues around gay and lesbian parenting and the impact of these non-traditional families on parents, their children and society. The substantial body of research has been conducted in lesbian parent families and has often compared children reared by lesbian mothers with a control group (usually children raised by single heterosexual mothers), to identify how the sexual orientation of parents impacts on their children (Stacey and Biblarz 2001). There is still a paucity of research on gay men and parenting, particularly those who *come-out* in the context of previous heterosexual relationships (McCann, 2010; Robinson and Brewster, 2013). The majority of research has concentrated on investigation of three concerns that are often expressed about the development of children reared in non-heterosexual families: parenting attitudes and behaviour; children's gender identity and sexual orientation; children's emotional and social development (Green 1978, Perrin 2002, American Psychological Association 2004; Robinson and Brewster, 2013). This research had important implications for lesbian and gay parents as in the past most children were conceived within heterosexual relationships and following separation decisions were often made in custody cases where sexual orientation was cited as reason enough to deny custody or visitation rights to the lesbian mother or gay father (Ritenhouse, 2011). Heteronormative assumptions have, and continue to, dominate discourses on parenting and family (King and Pattison 1991; Allen and Burrell 1996; Hanssen, 2012).

Most studies exploring issues around gay parenting have been based on comparative research designs, where lesbian and gay parents were either compared with each other or with straight parents. An early study by Golombok, Spencer and Rutter (1983) compared a group of children raised in lesbian households with a group raised by single mothers. The study explored various development outcomes, including psycho-social, emotional and behaviour development and find no significant developmental differences between the two groups or greater risk of psychiatric risk factors. Concerns related to lesbian and gay parenting are often constructed in relation to idealised notions of family life and stereotypes that suggest homosexuality is incompatible with a parenting identity (Weston 1991). Specific concerns against the suitability of non-heterosexual parenting assume that lesbians and gay men are mentally ill, lesbians are less maternal than straight women and lesbian and gay relationships leave little time for children (American Psychological Association 2004; Berkowitz and Marsiglio, 2007). The idea that children are better raised by a male and female parent is predominantly based on tradition, not research informed evidence and ignores the complexity that 'family structure has never had a successful blueprint for raising children' (Diamant, 1999, p23). The notion of what counts as a family continues to find ambivalence towards gay-parent families (Moore and Stambolis-Rushstorfer, 2013).

In a study exploring the quality of same-sex parental relationships Peplau and Beals (2004) found no difference with straight couples. In contrast to this view, other studies have found increased levels of relationship satisfaction and quality of sexual relations in lesbian couples both with and without children (Koepke, Hare and Moran 1992). For lesbians and gay men in relationships, Diamant (1999) stresses that planning for a family involves significant preparations, a point supported by Dunne (1999) who found it was not unusual for prospective gay parents to move house, change employment and engage in extensive life changes as part of their move to parenthood. In relation to day-to-day

functioning within families, there is evidence to show that lesbian and gay parents divide work fairly and are satisfied with partner relationships (Patterson 2004a). In support of this, Bergman et al. (2010) found that gay fathers dealt with issues similarly to other parents and in addition would often negotiate their career downwards to focus more on their parenting role. Bos (2010) supports this and found that there were no significant differences between gay and straight fathers in terms of emotional involvement, parental concern, children's well-being and parental burden/stress. However, when fathers felt the need to defend their identities as a gay father, this could impact negatively on the father-child relationship, child well-being and parental stress levels (Bos, 2010). Additional challenges were created when there was less social support and fathers felt this impacted negatively on their gay identity (Tornello, Farr and Patterson, 2011).

Negative opinions of lesbian and gay parents are commonly cited in the British media, with a range of stereotypical images of lesbians and gay men quoted as reasons against them being parents. In an analysis of media output from 1997 to 2000 the six most common views cited against lesbian and gay parenting viewed it as: sinful; unnatural; suggested parents ignored the best interests of their children; children lacked appropriate role models; children would grow up gay and confused and; children were more likely to be bullied. Many of these arguments were first put forward in the 1970s and are still been postulated in academic literature (Clarke 2001). For example, Morgan (2002) argues that children are more likely to suffer gender difficulties, face excessive bullying and that the lesbian and gay community are anti-parenting (Brinamen and Mitchell, 2008). Hicks (2003) addresses this by arguing that the main basis for the claims made by Morgan are based on a discourse that aims to associate the 'natural family' with heterosexuality, and 'unnatural' and 'anti-family' with homosexuality and that children suffer as a result. This is supported by Lubbe (2007) who argues that same-gender families challenge the dominant construction of family

biologically, legally and socially and that heterosexuality is still seen as the desirable norm. The dominant heterosexual position is further challenged by gay men who are fathers, as they are seen as completely incompatible constructions of parenting and family (Giesler, 2012).

Focusing specifically on men, Miller (1979) explored the nature and quality of fathering abilities with a snowball sample of 40 homosexual fathers and their children of 14-years and older. This early study found that a number of the fathers were still living with the child's mother and high levels of family tension were reported in this situation. When fathers decided to move away from the family home, their relationship with children tended to improve. In a comparison of gay and straight fathers, no differences were found in problem solving abilities, providing recreation for children, or in encouraging autonomy in their children (Herman, 1990). A later study of 101 gay fathers found that 31.7% of children under 11-years old were living with their father for at least half of the week, even though the majority had been conceived within marriage and only 7% of fathers played a minor role or were not consulted in decisions about their children (Barrett and Tasker, 2001). Bigner (1999) found that gay fathers were similar to non-gay fathers and where differences did occur these were generally positive (e.g. more astute to children's needs, more strict with children, less authoritarian), (Bos, 2010) which is supported by Patterson (2004b) although she cautions that these findings are often based on self-reports from fathers. From a positive perspective Bigner (1999) suggests that gay fathers can incorporate more nurturing and expressive functions into their parent identity, as they do not feel constrained by hegemonic gender expectations and are in a unique position to influence the position their sons take on masculinity, heterosexism and homophobia (Armesto and Shapiro, 2011).

The evidence from studies spanning over 30 years of lesbians and gay men as parents has failed to provide any consistent evidence that lesbian and gay parents place children at risk, or cause them disadvantage (Turner, Scadden and

Harris, 1990; Patterson and Redding, 1996; Perrin et al., 2002; Crouch, 2012). A potentially valid criticism of many studies is that they are based on small self-selected sample sizes. Allen and Burrell (1996) attempt to address this in their meta-analysis by including studies that had sufficient statistical information for calculating an effect size to address shortcomings raised by Redding (2003). They also used the variance-centred technique of meta-analysis to calculate a weighted average correlation, where non-significant chi-square values indicate homogenous findings, showing a non-significant level of inconsistency between correlations. Each of the correlations in the meta-analysis were based on findings from between 4-13 studies. Overall, no significant differences were found among children raised in heterosexual and non-heterosexual families. The confidence levels from the analysis indicate that the possibility of major differences on larger sample sizes appears small and there is sufficient power to detect large or medium effects. Stacey and Biblarz (2001), examined 21 studies published from 1981-1998, to address sociological questions about how the sexual identity of non-heterosexual parents impacts on children. This meta-analysis focused on quantitative studies with a comparison group and included findings directly relevant to children's development. Overall they found that on some dimensions the sexual orientation of the parent mattered more than is often claimed (e.g. some evidence of gender neutral play, difficulty in concluding the incidence of homosexuality in children accurately because many children were still young or adolescents). However, the study concludes there is no basis for considering parental sexual orientation in decisions about children's best interests.

A common issue between the meta-analyses are that only 3 out of the 18 studies included in Allen and Burrell's (1996) analysis and 3 out of the 21 included in the Stacey and Biblarz (2001) analysis, are based on gay fathers. Although 11 of the 21 in the later analysis by Stacey and Biblarz (*ibid*) were included in the analysis by Allen and Burrell, the level of research on gay fathers is lower and raises issues about the appropriateness of applying findings from lesbian mothers

directly to gay fathers without question. The American Sociological Association (2013) identified methodological problems in many of these studies, including children spending time in different family contexts and small sample sizes. However, overall they concluded,

The clear and consistent consensus in the social science profession is that across a wide range of indicators, children fare just as well when they are raised by same-sex parents when compared to children raised by opposite-sex parents (p. 3)

However, for successful parenting, good social support is needed and the positioning of gay parents by both the gay and straight community can isolate and limit support. To address this, further research is needed on how fathers and families manage the transition to identifying as an openly gay parent and how they negotiate their identity as a gay parent in the context of heteronormative parenting discourses.

2.4.3 Having a gay parent: The impact on children

A limited number of studies have explored the impact on children of having lesbian or gay parents. These studies have generally hypothesised that children reared in non-heterosexual families are more likely to have problems in terms of gender and sexual identity; gender role behaviour or; social relationships. This premise has generally been based on psychoanalytic or social learning theories that emphasise the importance of the distinctive contributions of a mother and father for children's healthy personal and social development in children (Patterson 1992). Traditional psychoanalytic theories attribute the development of homosexuality to disturbed parental relationships and an unresolved oedipal complex (desire for sexual contact with the opposite sex parent and rivalry with the same sex parent) leading to sexual identification with same-sex partners (Bremmer and Slater, 2003). Classical social learning theory states that two important processes in gender development are differential modelling and

reinforcement and based on this, children in gay families would be more likely in later years to engage in same-sex relationships (Golombok and Tasker, 1996). Contemporary theories propose other developmental trajectories, based on wider social influences, but these are rarely cited (Mooney-Somers and Golombok 2000).

Patterson (1997) reviewed personal development and found that the social competence of children with lesbian and gay parents was rated as normal, with no significant differences found in personality, locus of control, moral judgements, or behaviour problems. One difference in children of lesbian mothers found they reported greater reactions to stress, leading to more frequent episodes of anger, being upset or scared but in contrast the children were also more often joyful, content and comfortable. A possibility to account for the elevated levels of both dimensions of behaviour could be that children with lesbian mothers had increased awareness of their feelings and were more willing to report this. A review by Fitzgerald (1999) examined studies based on children with divorced lesbian or gay parents and those who were planned within same-sex relationships. She found no significant differences in development of self-concept, self-esteem, behaviour, intelligence or psychiatric evaluations, adding further support to Patterson (1997).

Anderssen, Amlie and Ytterøy (2002) reviewed 12 studies of lesbian families that had used various measures to explore emotional functioning and again found no significant differences to children to comparable heterosexual families. For positive behaviour adjustment (how children behave according to social expectations), there was no evidence of increased prevalence of behaviour or sociability difficulties, but again this is based on lesbian families, as no studies of gay father families had explored this dimension. A study by Golombok et al. (2003), based on longitudinal data from a population study of mothers, found that lesbian mother families had positive mother/child relationships, well-adjusted children and no significant differences in levels of child psychiatric

disorders. This study is particularly important, as, in addition to confirming findings from earlier studies and reviews, it addresses one of the main criticisms of the majority of studies with lesbian and gay families as it is based on a general population rather than a self-selecting sample. An Australian study of same-sex families found that on general health and family cohesion, children reared in same-sex families, compared to the general population, had significantly better outcomes (Crouch, 2012). This study included data from 500 children and although 80% of survey tools were completed by a female parent, it still includes a relatively large sample of children from gay father headed families.

Gender identity is about self-identification as a male or female and begins to emerge in early childhood whereas, gender-role behaviour is about a set of behaviour expectations that a society imposes and is expressed in terms of masculinity and femininity (Patterson 1997, Bremner and Slater 2003). Families, peers, society and cultural expectations influence early learning and this leads to significant peer pressure in adolescence to abide by gender stereotypes and expectations (Bigner, 1999). In many western societies it can be difficult for individuals to accept any form of sexual identity apart from heterosexuality and other identities can be equated with negative social and economic consequences (Wishik and Pierce, 1995; Hanssen, 2007; Guasp, 2010; Hanssen, 2012). Over the past decades, a number of studies have explored early gender identity and role behaviour (e.g. Green, 1978, Golombok, Spencer and Rutter, 1983; Patterson, 1992; Fitzgerald 1999; Anderssen, Amlie and Ytterøy, 2002). Researchers followed children through to early adulthood to explore later sexual identity and incidence of homosexuality and found no significant differences (Bailey et al., 1995; Golombok and Tasker, 1996).

Patterson (1997) recruited a sample of 66 lesbian mothers and found that the vast majority of children raised in lesbian families were in contact with relatives. This provided the children with regular contact with both female and male role models. There was no evidence to suggest that gender identity and role

behaviour was problematic, although empirical research to evaluate different theoretical perspectives of gender development is needed. In support of this, reviews by Fitzgerald (1999) and Anderssen et al. (2002) using a range of measures (e.g. clothing choice, toy choice, parent reports, questionnaires), found no significant differences on any account, although Anderssen et al. (2002) noted that more daughters of lesbian mothers preferred boy typical activities. Gender behaviour is a complex issue though and there is evidence to suggest that sons may respond in more complex ways to parental sexual orientation. On some measures of play and behaviour, sons of lesbian mothers respond in less traditionally masculine ways than children raised with heterosexual parents. However, on other measures, such as occupational goals, they are more confirming than daughters of lesbian mothers (though not than sons of straight mothers) (Stacey and Biblarz, 2001). More recent research by Goldberg, Kashy and Smith (2012) found that the play behaviour of boys and girls in same-sex headed families was less gendered than the play behaviour of children in heterosexual-parent families. This difference has no reason to be seen as problematic and may be explained by same-sex parents being less rigid over gender stereotypes and more willing to provide varied play experiences for their children (Stacey and Biblarz 2001). This is supported by Bos and Sandfort (2010), who found that 8-12 year old children of lesbian mothers felt less pressure to conform to expected gender stereotypes.

A recurrent theme of research exploring outcomes for children raised by non-heterosexual parents focuses on the later development of sexual orientation. Anderssen et al. (2002) found no significant differences in the number of children who identified as homosexual in a review of 23 studies exploring outcomes for adult-children with lesbian or gay parents. The studies cited were all based on non-clinical samples and empirical data, covered a range of qualitative and quantitative measures and each had a control group. However, as with other reviews there was less data from children raised by gay fathers, with only three

studies focusing on children in this group. A valid criticism often made of these studies is that they either rely on parental reports of sexual orientation in children or the studies are conducted when children are still developing their sexual orientation, reducing reliability. In a review of gay and lesbian parenting, the American Psychological Association (2004) state that gender identity develops in much the same way among children of heterosexual and homosexual parents and there is no evidence to support increased prevalence of homosexuality in these children. Bailey et al. (1995) attempted to address this criticism by studying 78 adult sons with gay fathers. The incidence of non-heterosexual orientation was found to be 10%, which may be higher than general population. Stacey and Biblarz (2001) suggest that any difference may be linked to a broadening of children's gender and sexual repertoires, and argue that gender and sexual orientation need to be viewed as interacting in family structures and further research, which views sexual orientation as a continuum rather than a dichotomy, is needed to reach more robust conclusions.

Golombok and Tasker (1996) looked prospectively at development of sexual orientation from data gathered at two points (9.5 years and 23.5 years). The initial data was based on 39 children raised by lesbian mothers and an equal size control group of children raised with single mothers. The study used a control of single mothers because children were alike in being raised by mothers. The follow-up study was based on interviews with 25 children raised in lesbian families and 25 in heterosexual families. No significant differences in demographic variables or reported feelings of attraction to someone of the same sex were evident in the two groups. Children brought up in lesbian households were more likely to consider the possibility of a same-sex relationship, but the assumption that children brought up in lesbian households would be lesbian or gay themselves was not supported. Two possibilities about the accuracy of this data could be under-reporting of same-sex desire and that it utilised volunteer participants. However, the young adults brought up in lesbian households were

more open when discussing issues of sexuality and based on their family background it could be argued that young adults brought up in heterosexual families may be more likely to under report because of discrimination and stigma in society. Much of this research is built on the hypothesis that gay and lesbian parents are more likely to have non-heterosexual children (Cameron, 2006). Schumm (2010) reviewed a number of studies and found, contradictive to many past studies, that there was evidence to support the hypothesis. This may seem uncontroversial, however, it perpetuates heteronormative expectations that still continue to dominate society (Hanssen, 2012) and problematise the idea of identifying as non-heterosexual.

A third broad area of concern for children brought up in lesbian or gay families is that they will experience difficulties with social relationships and be stigmatised or bullied. Early studies initiated in the 1970s found that children in gay families were no more likely to be teased or bullied or in the quality of their friendships than children in heterosexual families (Mooney-Somers and Golombok 2000). Sculenberg (1985) undertook a questionnaire study of whether children (under 12) had difficulties with social relationships. Among the children who acknowledged that other people knew they had a gay parent, only one had experienced harassment. In a review by Anderssen et al. (2002) there were no significant difference in terms of bullying due to the sexual orientation of children's parents, but there was increased evidence of teasing for a group of 13 Danish children, especially around the ages of 10-11. The review also reports that it was more common for male children to experience teasing about being gay themselves and for female children to be teased about their mother's sexual orientation. These findings are supported by the on-going study by Crouch et al. (2013). Golombok et al. (2003) found that there was a trend for lesbian mothers to report greater peer problems, but this was not supported with reports from their children, which highlights the importance of collecting data from both parents and children.

A potential influence on social relationships for children will be the decision of when and whom to disclose that they are part of a gay family. There is some evidence that children may try to conceal this information (Fitzgerald, 1999), which suggests that they may find disclosure a difficult issue. Tasker (2002) identified that mothers helped children to decide when it may and may not be safe to be out. Gay fathers show understanding of these issues for children, but they also need to help them understand that not all in society are hostile (Bozett, 1988). This study used unstructured interviews with 13 female and 6 male children (aged 14-35) to explore issues around disclosure by children with gay fathers. For children who were concerned that their father's gay identity may be problematic, the children responded in different ways by: controlling their father's behaviour (e.g. asking their father to avoid any affection for his partner in public); controlling their own behaviour (e.g. not inviting their father to a function); or controlling others (e.g. not inviting a friend home). The study identified that the strategy the child used was moderated by perceptual, situational, or maturational factors. Perceptual factors were mutuality (how much fathers and children had in common) and obtrusiveness (not acting in a way identified with being gay). Situational factors, such as living arrangements often dictated what strategies were used and how open the children needed to be. Maturation factors were related to age, with older children having more control about how they could deal with the decision to disclose. The more frequently these factors are used, the more frequently the control strategies will be used. This shows that the response of children is complex and that there are clear considerations for them in terms of managing their family and social identities within the socio-cultural context (Tasker, Barrett and De Simone, 2010).

The majority of research focused on gay parenting has been conducted within lesbian headed families, although more research with gay male headed families has been conducted more recently. However, the dominant tradition of this

research has been a problematizing perspective. Gay families are often approached to investigate impaired development, problems with gender-identity development and exploring the number of children who may identify as non-heterosexual. Irrespective of findings, children raised by heterosexual parents can have development impairment, problems with gender identity, or identify as non-heterosexual. There is also very little evidence of this problematizing research taking account of the socio-cultural environment and how this impacts on non-heterosexual families. The evidence presented clearly shows how socio-cultural factors impact on the decisions men make about how they position their sexual identity, how they enter parenting and how they manage disclosure of a gay identity. Research with gay families needs to take account of this – all parents, parent in a socio-cultural environment.

2.5 The interface between gay families and society

2.5.1 Coming out to family members

As outlined by Power et al. (2012), a number of children with gay fathers have been conceived in heterosexual relationships and this raises potential challenges in terms of coming out and (re)constructing the family in the socio-cultural environment. Bozett (1980) identifies three main reasons for fathers not disclosing their sexual identity: intense fear of rejection by others; rejecting their homosexuality because of shame; fear of vindictiveness and reprisals from their ex-wife. Stress of non-disclosure is linked to the intimacy of the relationship between the father and child, with the closer the relationship the more important the father's desire to be open about their identity. In many respects this may seem a vicious circle, as it is likely that the closer a father is to his children the more significant the desire to be honest but also the more intense the fear of rejection. Enforced dishonesty with children is another source of stress in the decision process. As well as the potential to harm the father/child relationship it suggests to children that being gay is wrong (Armesto 2002; Folgerø, 2008) and continues the historic privileging of heterosexuality over

homosexuality that often occurs mundanely in social interactions (Kitzinger, 2005; Alexander, 2011).

For previously married men, the model proposed by Brinaman and Mitchell (2008), focused on integrating a gay and parent identity, will mean fathers need to create a salient gay identity after being a parent. Fathers may also be cautious about disclosure to sons, as it may be seen as more of a threat to their developing gender identity and masculinity and there is evidence that daughters are more likely to respond positively (Barrett and Tasker 2001). Earlier research by Miller (1979) partly attributed this to society being more concerned with the risk seen of sons developing homosexuality, which carries the implicit heterosexist assumption that gay children are less desirable, particularly gay males.

Among parents the desire to protect their children from hostility will be strong. For gay fathers this desire is often connected with disclosure of their sexual identity, as they believe their children knowing about their sexual identity and sharing this with others may open them to prejudice, discrimination and homophobia. The decision to disclose requires fathers to connect with two worlds: disclosing their gay identity to non-gays and their father identity to gays. This can expose fathers to homophobia at personal (e.g. stereotypes), interpersonal (e.g. violence against gay men), institutional (e.g. education and health services) and societal levels (e.g. discriminatory policies) (Armesto 2002). Fathers have concern over the impact of disclosure on their children's social relationships for children and the possibility they will experience prejudice and discrimination (Bigner, 1999). To protect children from probing questions and prejudice, Bozett (1980) found that fathers often told children to refer to their live-in partner as a housemate. Some also arranged for children to attend school out of their own neighbourhood so that they had two sets of friends and could use this as a strategy to avoid difficulties with peer relationships and discrimination. Although this could help families to manage the issue of

disclosure, it raises a number of potential difficulties for fathers and children on how they reconcile their identity as a gay man and father (Bozett, 1984; Power et al., 2012).

For gay fathers, their identity as a gay man and a father may be equated to 'faulty parenting' (Armesto 2002; Robinson and Brewster, 2013) and non-acceptance by other parents (Brinaman and Mitchell, 2008). This can be made more hostile if gay fathers experience homophobia or heterosexism, often through not acknowledging the existence of gay or lesbian people (Rhoads 1997; Anderson, 2009). This is particularly problematic as lack of acknowledgment has the potential to lead to isolation and segregation for all members of the family (Tuazon-McCheyne, 2010). When a decision is made to disclose, this can present challenges for all men, but particularly previously (heterosexually) married fathers. They have to negotiate disclosure to their wife and children and this is challenging (Buxton, 2001). Casper (2003) and McCann (2010) suggest that to better understand these issues more research is needed exploring how sexual orientation and identity formation affect parenting and the coherence of the parenting discourses of gay fathers.

2.5.2 The challenge of the family-societal interface

Clarke (2002) found that the most prevalent construction of non-heterosexual families in society was for them to draw on the discourse of 'sameness' around four themes: emphasising love and security; parallelism; emphasising ordinariness; highlighting compensations for deficits. For all families, love and security are important, and this is cited as being no different in non-heterosexual families. Parallelism compares non-heterosexual and heterosexual families, often downplaying the sexuality of parents, to counter claims about the lack of role models for children in terms of gender development. The third strategy emphasises ordinariness and similarity in families and is often related to carrying out mundane tasks and used to give lesbian and gay parents status as a family. The last, highlighting compensations for deficits, often involves lesbian and gay

parents listing role models their children have outside the immediate family. A particular issue raised by gay parents was around reconciling expected gender roles (e.g. mother's carry out care) with their role as a parent (Robinson and Brewster, 2013). Over recent years gay parents have challenged the dominant discourse of heterosexual parenting. The family structures of gay parents are different, but not necessarily the practices, and the challenge is to integrate these in mainstream society without the perceived risk of destabilising the dominant position.

This can bring benefits as a way of reporting lesbian and gay families in a way that does not question common sense beliefs and ideas about families and allows engagement with mainstream concerns. It also affords recognition of lesbian and gay families (Clarke, 2002), albeit to a limited degree. However, this raises important questions about whether recognition is enough. Do non-heterosexual families need more than this? To be valued in their own right and accorded the support that is taken as granted as being important to heterosexual families? Clarke (2002) acknowledges this in discussion of the cost that the normalising agenda has for lesbian and gay families, a point supported by Armesto (2002). This includes reinforcing rather than resisting heterosexual norms, support for the pre-eminence of heterosexual families as what children need and taking a defensive, rather than celebratory, attitude to lesbian and gay families (Giesler, 2012). At worst, the response to validate the existence of non-heterosexual families is grounded in a homophobic discourse (Stacey and Davenport, 2002) and is focused on the identification of problems rather than looking at how families can be supported. Stacey and Biblarz (2001) add weight to this, but also argue that an alternative strategy that moves beyond heteronormativity, without forfeiting the benefits comparative research has brought, could still offer fruitful potential.

2.6 Summary and Research Rationale

Hegemonic masculinity maintains the dominant position of a straight identity and can create homophobia towards gay men and can impact negatively on men's fathering identities. A review of evidence on gay parenting identifies that research on gay fathers and their families remains limited. Much of the early research was conducted from a deficit perspective: either problematizing gay families; or looking for deficits evident in children raised by same-sex parents. The evidence reviewed identifies no discernible disadvantages for children raised in gay families attributable to the sexual orientation of their parents. There is potential that children may experience increased levels of hostility, but this is predicated on heterosexuality being seen as the desirable norm. However, parenting and family are constructions that are performed - not static entities - and the challenge is to find out how families position themselves against these heteronormative norms. Hanssen (2012) summarises this well by stating living in a gay family, 'means living outside normality' (p. 252) and this notion of normality has been constructed by dominant historical, social, cultural and political privileging of heterosexuality. Casper (2003) and McCann (2010) suggest that to better understand gay fathers and their families research is needed exploring how sexual orientation and a gay sexual identity affect parenting discourses.

Although there has been research on the process of coming out, the resulting models that take little or no account of the historical and socio-cultural context. They focus on coming out as a time bound event – suggesting that it is a process that individuals engage in and complete by early adulthood. While this may apply to some men who identify as gay, previously (heterosexually) married fathers who later identify as gay do not fit this group. These fathers managed, often for many years, a private identity as a gay man and a public identity as a *straight* man. Fathers constructed this difference in their identities to manage historical

social, political, legal and cultural expectations that privileged heterosexuality (Brickwell, 2000). The process of coming out has implications for fathers and their children, but this broader positioning of coming out has received very limited investigation. To address this, research was needed to better understand how these fathers managed maintenance of their public/private identities, the repositioning of their identity and the implications of this for their children. This study addresses this by researching the process of previously (heterosexually) married men coming out after substantial time in a heterosexual relationship and how they re-position their family and manage a gay identity as a family.

Many past studies have focused on either positioning gay families from the perspective of problems they may cause parents, or children or comparing them against heterosexual families to show how they offer comparable support and emotional warmth for children. The problem with this approach is that it follows a heterosexist agenda simply justifies the existence of gay headed families, rather than aiming to gain an understanding of how they (re)construct their family in the context of this agenda. There is also limited account taken of men, who were previously married and fathers and later publicly identify as gay. This study responds to this by approaching participants in a respectful way that values families with a gay father. The study aimed to explore how gay fathers re-position their identities, manage this as a family and respond to dominant heteronormative family discourses. To address this, the overarching research question explores:

- *How gay men who are fathers manage their sexual identity within historically dominant discourses and social practices of families and fathering?*

Each person has a range of identities that contribute to their social identity. As part of the coming out process, previously (heterosexually) married fathers disrupt their identities as a husband and father. This made fathers accountable for disrupting the dominant historically situated discourses associated with

hegemonic masculinity (Wetherell and Edley, 1999), marriage and fatherhood (i.e. head of the family, provider and protector) (Dryden, Doherty and Nicolson, 2010). The aim of this study is to research this using an in-depth methodology that enabled the voices of participants to be heard in the context of social constructions around men, masculinity, marriage, parenting, heteronormativity and how this positions those who identify with a non-heterosexual identity (Seidman, 2010). To investigate sexual identity within the context of dominant constructions of masculinity and fatherhood four research sub-questions were devised:

- 1. How do fathers account for the positioning of their sexual identity over time?*
- 2. How do fathers regulate their sexual identity to manage their identities as a gay man and father over time?*
- 3. How do fathers account for the social construction of their sexual identity as a gay man?*
- 4. How is the (re)construction of family identity within and outside the family home regulated by heteronormative discourses?*

The following chapter outlines the methodological approach for the study and the method used for data collection to address the points outlined above to address the overall research question. The chapter also provides a detailed account of the process of interviewing and the data analysis approach.

CHAPTER THREE

3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how gay men who fathered children in a heterosexual marriage position themselves within historically situated heteronormative discourses. These discourses construct social practices, such as family, marriage and parenting and the accepted subject-positions for these constructions. As discussed in chapter two Foucault argued discourses are productive of objects that are spoken about (e.g. family, sexuality, gender) and from this notions of 'truth' emerge for particular periods in history (Carabine, 2001). This is significant, as although homosexuality has been practiced for many centuries, the position of a homosexual social subject only became evident in the 19th century. A Foucauldian framework focuses on how subject positions are regulated through social institutions (e.g. cultural sexual identity expectations; legal frameworks and government policy) and self-regulation (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2007). Fathers who identify as gay within a heterosexual relationship disrupt the dominant discourses of their identities as a straight man, husband, father and family member and as such, may have to account for the decisions they make in the context of their family and wider social interactions. This chapter will detail the design of the study and discuss how ethical considerations were made at each stage of the study to ensure the integrity of the research. The approach to recruiting participants, data collection and analysis is also discussed. Finally there is discussion of how consideration of validity and reliability are addressed.

3.2 Research design: Critical realism and qualitative interviews

Epistemological positions underpin the nature and scope of knowledge and how this is captured in the research process (Crotty, 1998). A positivist epistemology argues that,

*Accurate representations of the world can be produced
and these representations truthfully map the worlds of
real experience...* (Denzin, p. 265)

Constructionist epistemology argues knowledge is not found or discovered but is constructed. It is constructed, 'against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices language and so forth' (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197). There is an on-going debate between the ontological basis of knowledge: from one perspective being seen as realist, grounded in an objective reality, and the other; being grounded and existing in interactions and representations at a particular time, place and experience (Schwandt, 2000). More recently, a critical realist paradigm has emerged. This views knowledge as socially influenced, but also acknowledges material existence outside of this social influence. The existence of knowledge is influenced by humans, including the researcher, and therefore it can only ever be partially accessed (Braun and Clark, 2013). Critical realism also rejects the scientific notion of causality – accepting that associations between events exist but these do not equate to definitive causality (Maxwell, 2012).

Hall (1997) outlines discourse as a system of representing knowledge – the rules and practices – that give meaning. There can be multiple representations of the world and meaning is constructed from varied representations through language and discourse (Edley, 2001a) and based on relationships between subjects (Sandu, 2011). The notion of meaning is key as it transcends the binary between what is said, the language, and what is done, the practice. A criticism often levelled at discourse theory is that it does not see the existence of 'things' outside of the discursive arena. They do exist but only becomes meaningful in

text. It is the practices, cultural rules and restrictions that produce knowledge and meaning comes from knowledge (Hall, 1997; Ryan and Morgan, 2011). Critical realism challenges the notion of fixed meaning and structure but alongside this sees mechanisms, such as social practices and structures as real (e.g. social inequalities). Within this realm a critical realist approach would see sexual identity as part of society and formed as part of societal beliefs, ideologies and identities and creating a reality in the form of social institutions and institutionalisation (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). This has particular relevance to gay men who are fathers as the positioning (which exist from social practices, discourses and objects) of homosexuality and masculinity have changed over time in response to political, legal and social constructions (Clarke et al., 2010). Homosexuality was situated within a discourse of control and debilitating treatments (e.g. illegal and deviant) and this is being challenged by legislative change based on equality and equal rights (Drazenovich, 2012; Masci, Sclopacc and Lipka, 2013).

Critical psychology challenges traditional psychology in three areas: language, meaning and truth (Hanna, 2013). This can be linked to the earlier work of Parker (1992) and the 'turn to language' of discursive methodologies. The turn to discourse focuses on hegemony and the struggles over power, that emerge from this, in all aspects of cultural, economic and political life (Fairclough, 2001). A Foucauldian approach focuses on the way that power relations are positioned through practice and language and how these are constructed and situated historically (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000).

In addition to managing a non-heterosexual identity and negotiating coming out, fathers also have to manage the *regime of truth* constructed from dominant discourses that construct 'family' and 'parenting' (Parker, 1992). The practice of parenting is associated with identities or subject positions of protector and provider and is historically situated with a heterosexual orientation as discussed in chapter two. There is also a challenge as homosexuality has been associated

with danger towards children, from the concern that they may 'become' homosexual if they spend time with homosexuals; may be subject to bullying due to homophobia (i.e. having a gay father) (Trueland, 2012); or at danger because of predatory behaviour from homosexuals (Bell, 2000). In many situations these heteronormative discourses make fathers, who identify as gay, accountable for the decision to be out as a parent and responsible for positioning their families as different to the discursive formations that sustain a heteronormative *regime of truth* on the construction of family life.

Qualitative methods suited to discursive research are focus groups and interviews. Focus groups and interviews both allow the analysis of discourse but in different ways. Focus groups enable varied voices to be heard simultaneously and in doing so will often go in different directions, dependent on the wishes of group members (Barbour and Schostak, 2011). Focus group can be useful for sharing ideas, beliefs and attitudes and enabling a collective rather than individual perspectives. However the collectivist nature of focus groups makes them less suited when participants are sharing intimate details, particularly if they are not known to each other and it is not clear how comfortable they may feel or the level of agreement that may be expressed (Madriz, 2000). In contrast interviews are well suited to subjects that require responses to more personal detail and sensitive topics, particularly as they provide a forum to clarify and probe points in further detail (Barriball, 1994; Kvale and Svend, 2009). Another clear strength of interviews is they allow insight into the social world and consequently social practices, that create subject positions and meaning for individuals in the social context in which they occur (Miller and Glassner, 2004).

Interviews can be seen on a continuum from structured to unstructured. Within this continuum semi-structured interviews have direction, in terms of covering the same broad topics, however, given that they do not follow a fully predetermined plan they also enable participants to provide new topics and spend more time on some questions and less on others, to produce an account

that reflects their reality and actions (Kvale and Svend, 2009). A semi-structured interview method also acknowledges that not every word has the same meaning for every respondent, and needs to be seen in the context of individual practices (Barriball, 1994). These practices are key to this study as they construct subjectivity and subjects as language, produced in interviews arrange the social world in certain way and this informs the social practices of individuals (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000). They also make meaning and are relevant for exploration as Foucault argues that each discourse (e.g. heteronormativity) legitimises accepted/prescribed actions and ways of behaving. It is through these, some actions are accepted and others marginalised and participants have to account for marginalised actions, such as identifying as gay and being a father (Burr, 2003; Tyler and Williams, 2014). Individual Interviews provide a vehicle for participants to account for their practices and actions within the social context they occurred without influence from others.

A final benefit of interviews, particularly for this topic of study, is they allow the researcher to display sensitivity and a non-judgmental approach to participant accounts. For example, by accepting different versions of reality and not problematising minority status and practices. For most people it is rare for another person to listen to them talk about their experiences in such a focused way. It was important in this study to demonstrate commitment to the knowledge produced in the interviews, to be receptive and for the interview to be a positive experience for participants (Wenger, 2001; Kvale and Svend, 2009). It is acknowledged that no matter how well an interview is conducted it is not equivalent to naturally occurring data, which is sometimes seen as the ideal with discourse approaches (Wiggins and Potter, 2007; Potter, 2012). However Hanna (2013) emphasises that Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA), which focuses on macro-structures (e.g. institutions such as family, legal structures and government) and how these are regulated through power does not necessarily require a focus on naturally occurring data. It would be unlikely to be able to

capture the level of depth and detail on the topic to be explored in any naturally occurring situation or fully acknowledge the power/knowledge nexus discussed by Hanna (2013), making interviews particularly suited to FDA.

3.2.1 Data collection

Critical realism challenges the notion of fixed meanings. Knowledge from social institutions and interactions produces meaning and there are multiple versions. A key location for the production of knowledge and meaning making is language. Qualitative interviews as a method of data collection are therefore an appropriate method for the collection of data to gain an insight into the process of meaning making and knowledge construction (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, Clarke et al., 2010). Foucault (1998) argued that individuals are influenced by regimes of truth and become accountable to these formations. Qualitative interviews allow exploration of this accountability and meaning and the method is therefore well suited to this study. Data produced from qualitative interviews provides a sound basis for text based analysis drawing on a Foucauldian approach. Interview data also allows exploration of how subject positions of family and parenting are negotiated by gay fathers within the context of heteronormative social expectations and a desire for self-improvement and how tension between competing positions are managed (Hanna, 2013).

3.2.2 Sampling

The term 'gay father' was selected to convey clearly that the research wanted to recruit participants who identified as gay and had children. Careful consideration was given to how the study target group was defined. The aim was to be inclusive and avoid placing unnecessary restrictions on potential participants. On reflection this had both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage was that it avoided making access to a difficult to reach group even harder. How participants define themselves is a key issue with projects focused on 'sensitive' issues. Subjects have multiple identities and one identity may be fore-grounded at different times and in different contexts. An overarching aim of the study

design was to be sensitive to participants and avoid any connotation of a pathologising approach (Zitz, Burns and Tacconelli, 2014). Terms, such as sexual orientation and homosexual were avoided as they are ambiguous, often seen as pathologising and negative and can suggest an essentialist static basis for complex positions (Weeks, 2012). Beyond this no further parameters were placed on participants' sexual identity and family construction was left to self-definition (as the research approach was about empowering participants and issues of identity).

A criticism of research within the field of LGBT psychology is that it predominately focuses on younger, white, able-bodied urban gay men and this renders the voices of other groups unheard exposing the field to claims of classism, racism and sexism. LGBT research also often recruits participants that are less representative of working-class people (Clarke and Peel, 2007a; Clarke et al., 2010). As a researcher I was aware of these issues and the tension between accessing a sample and aiming to hear the more marginalised voices with the gay community. However, Barriball (1994) argues that while validity and reliability are vital for credibility a highly selective sample within underrepresented groups can be equally distorting. The remit of this study was to collect accounts with gay fathers. As the majority of gay men are not parents and the majority of research with gay parents has been with lesbian mothers the study, as detailed in the research aims, was aiming to reach an underrepresented group within the LGBT community. Finally, given the focus of the study was on the accounts and actions of individuals, it was not about making claims to represent the complexity of all gay fathers but to offer insight into their particular subject positions (Clarke et al., 2010).

A 'wide net' approach, given the challenges of reaching gay fathers, was used (Patterson, 2004, Huebner et al., 2012). A self-selecting approach to sampling was used where information about the study was provided and potential participants were asked to make contact with the researcher to express an

interest in participating and/or for further information about the study. This could be seen as addressing some of the criticisms levied at snow-ball sampling, as none of the participants were known to the researcher or recruited through their involvement in other studies, which can contribute to marginalising voices of minority groups within a minority group (Clarke and Peel, 2007a; Clarke et al., 2010). However, as Bigner (1999, 2004), identifies gay fathers can be seen as a minority group within a minority and this provides justification for enabling their voices to be heard. Overall, decisions on recruiting a sample had to be balanced between what was feasible in terms of broader representation and gaining access to a hard to reach group (Clarke et al., 2010).

3.2.3 Conducting research with participants

3.2.3.1 Research integrity and ethical approval

It is vital that research is conducted at each stage with integrity to maintain the trust and confidence of participants and the wider research community (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). The research project received the approval of the required Sheffield Hallam University ethics committee and complied with all requests made (see appendix A). Ethical approval was granted for interviews with fathers and their children. However, two potential participants said they would take part but would not ask their children as their gay identity was a sensitive issue for the family. In addition to potential difficulties in recruiting participants within a reasonable travelling distance the decision was made not to include children as it would have required an additional 2-3 visits to each family. Each stage of the process was conducted with due diligence with the aim of ensuring transparency through the way literature is represented and reported; providing a clear methodological framework to guide the research process; accurately reflecting data collected and; drawing conclusions from the study. The decision to focus the analysis and subsequent discussion on fathers who had children and then identified as gay was carefully considered. A detailed rationale for this is discussed in section 3.4.2. This was based on enabling analysis and discussion of

the accounts and arguments to emerge from the data among a larger group of fathers where accounts focused on dealing with power through the discourse of heteronormativity and how this historically positioned sexual identity, relationships, family and parenting.

All researchers have a duty to conduct research to ensure that potential harm to participants is minimised as far as possible, that the research makes a positive contribution to the knowledge base of the subject and that the researcher conducts themselves in an appropriate manner. To meet these expectations, research needs to carefully consider beneficence and non-maleficence; being integrally sound; gain the informed consent of participants and; protect the confidentiality of participants. Even though participants were made aware of the type of questions that would be asked prior to interviews being conducted, there was still potential for harm to occur as the questions were covering sensitive topics around sexual identity, coming out and responding to heterosexist constructions around parenting and family life (BPS, 2009). The approach to interviewing focused on the research aims and did not digress to therapeutic support. However, Colbourne and Sque (2005) state that research interviews can have positive unplanned therapeutic benefits. However, there can also be unforeseen negative impacts. I had details of sources of support for participants. This included support groups for married men who identified as gay; parent line; gay groups; gay sexual health workers; and internet support groups. As participants were drawn from varied geographical areas information about sources of support were provided that were relevant and geographically accessible to each participant.

3.2.3.2 Gaining informed consent

The principle of informed consent is based on ensuring that each participant has a clear overview of the project; a clear understanding of what they are consenting to, in terms of their time, information provided and how this will be used. As part of this process, the right to withdraw consent up to the point of

submission of the final study and for any data provided to be withdrawn and securely destroyed was also made clear, as required by British Psychological Society (BPS) 2009 guidelines and prior to this the 2006 guidelines. Clear opportunities for questions were provided prior to consent being asked for and prior to each interview taking place. Where second interviews were conducted they provided an opportunity to restate key points that emerged during the first interview and for participants to offer clarification if required.

3.2.3.3 Protecting confidentiality

There is a duty on researchers to maintain the confidentiality of those who participate in research. As part of the consent process, participants were made aware that steps would be taken to maintain confidentiality, including the use of pseudonyms for names and alteration of key details (e.g. region where participants live; occupation). However, this needs to be balanced with other details that could potentially change the context and accuracy of the research. In this study, which was exploring coming out, marriage and parenting and how fathers (re)constructed their families, details relating to this were unchanged. Therefore, details about the number, age and gender of children were not altered. Details of the approximate time fathers had married and came out were unchanged and facts relating to social and culture issues were unchanged (e.g. time attended a Pride march; time of response to events such as HIV and Aids). This created the possibility that a person close to the participant reading extracts may be able to recognise a participant. Therefore the consent form made clear that it was not possible to provide a guarantee of full and complete anonymity in research (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). All participants were made aware of this and asked to acknowledge that this had been made clear to them as part of the consent procedure.

A database was constructed to note the names (pseudonyms only), brief personal details (relationship status, number of children etc.). This was saved as a password protected file and stored on a university computer that required

password access. One electronic copy of participants' initials and pseudonyms was kept as a password protected file on a password protected computer so no link could be made between names and pseudonyms. Completed consent forms were kept securely in a locked cabinet within a locked office. Interviews were recorded onto a digital recorder. Aide memoire notes made during and after interviews. These were destroyed securely after reflective points from them were typed, anonymised and saved in password protected files. As soon as possible after the interviews the recording was transferred onto a computer that was password protected and the recording erased from the portable recording device. Data was transcribed into separate files, each transcript was anonymised and the file password protected. One printed, anonymised transcript of each interview was used as part of the analysis process. These were kept in a locked cupboard, within a locked office when not being used for analysis. The only people to have access to the transcribed data were the researcher and his supervisors and at all times during the analysis process the anonymised transcripts were worked with. A record of pseudonyms and actual first names were kept in a locked cabinet and the only person to have access to this was the researcher. After completion of the study all recorded interviews will be securely destroyed.

3.3 Data collection procedure

3.3.1 Recruitment and study participants

Initially, sample recruitment was focused in the counties of North and South Yorkshire and Derbyshire. Contact was made with support groups for gay men; support groups for gay fathers and; online forums for gay men that may also be relevant to those who were fathers. Adverts were also placed in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community magazines to inform readers about the study and request participation. Research should always aim to do positive good and avoid doing harm. This study did not constitute research with a vulnerable group but was about a sensitive topic, so according to BPS guidelines

was seen as carrying more than minimal risk. Therefore, potential participants were approached through an independent person (e.g. support group facilitator; online group moderator) so they had initial details of the project before any contact with the researcher.

The initial request for participants was kept intentionally brief. It made clear who the target participant group was, explained that the study was part of my doctoral research and included an email address and web link to find more detailed information about the study (see appendix B). The additional information, which was distributed in printed and electronic forms, was designed to provide a clear overview and rationale for the study; how the study differed from the majority of past research on the topic; the time commitment required and; brief ethical protocol. Potential participants were provided with my contact email address and work telephone number to enable them to ask any questions or volunteer to participate. A request was also made to pass on the information to anyone they thought may be interested in participating in the study. I also attended three gay groups, at the request of the convenor (2 in South Yorkshire, 1 in North Yorkshire) to discuss the research project and answer any questions. These were seen as information providing rather than 'recruitment' events as I was aware that I did not want any potential participants to feel pressured into participating. Attendees at the group were not asked to agree to participate at these events, but additional written information was provided that could be taken away and read after the session. This information recapped the main points of the study and what participants were being asked to commit to (see appendix C). Contact details were also provided again.

Dissemination of recruitment information via online forums, groups and other media sources led to approximately 20 potential participants requesting further information. This was followed up using the same contact method the potential participant contacted me using. In response to this communication, six participants confirmed their willingness to participate in the study. Three

participants expressed a wish not to participate. This request not to participate was acknowledged with a short email thanking them for their time and confirmation that no further contact would be made and their communications and contact details erased. The remaining responders who did not respond to the additional information were contacted again via email. It was made clear in the message that if no response was received I would take this as indicating they did not want to participate. This decision was made to be respectful to individuals by providing information to gain consent for participation, while ensuring that participants did not feel pressurised into participating or awkward about not responding. In response to this, two more participants agreed to participate in the study.

In initial discussions with the convenors of the support groups and regional online support forums offers had been made to distribute details of the study more widely. Initially this was not requested in an attempt to manage the data collection process to the counties identified. Recruiting participants for the project proved more difficult than had been envisaged. This was most likely because of the sensitive nature of research topic, the group could be defined as hard to reach and concern for privacy and sensitivity (Clarke et al., 2010). As it required participants to account for and reflect on decisions on sexual identity, parenting and families that had either involved deceiving others (i.e. in the case of previously married men their wife, other family members and children) or; making a choice to parent and being accountable for disrupting the dominant constructions of family heteronormative discourses. Research, that poses any, 'potential threat for those involved' (Decker et al., 2011) is seen as sensitive research and researchers need to remain mindful of this at all times. To conduct a successful project that remains respectful and commands the confidence of participants requires trust between researchers and participants.

However, contact was made with the convenors to accept their offer of wider dissemination. This led to information being sent to contacts in Scotland,

Northampton, London, Manchester and other parts of south east England. This generated over 20 additional expressions of interest. The same process of providing more information and following this up on one occasion was followed to support the recruitment of additional participants. Prior to commencing of data collection two participants who had agreed to take part withdrew (one who had parented and then identified as gay; the other identified as gay and then parented). During the recruitment stage all the information potential participants requested was provided. Care was taken to provide specific answers to each question as I wanted participants to be fully informed prior to participating to ensure no harm was caused and that, as far as possible, were able to withdraw at this stage if they felt the study was not right for them. Information was provided in a timely way so that participants were able to make informed choices.

In the recruitment stage participants asked a number of questions to gauge my views on non-heterosexual identities and gay families (e.g. do you know many gay fathers; how do you think children with gay parents fare?). They were also concerned how the information they provided would be stored, used and disseminated. Reference was made to the project ethical consent documentation to offer clear responses to the collection, storage and use of information provided by participants. I was aware of the importance of gaining trust at an early stage to 'get access' to the group and how my actions would influence whether this was achieved (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Dillon, 2014). Full answers to questions were given and participants provided with an opportunity to seek any further clarification. Participants were assured that I was not condemning of their decisions or choices; opposed the pathologising of homosexuality and would manage the information they provided with care and sensitivity (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Rubin and Rubin, 2012).

It was explained that recordings of interviews would be kept on a work computer, in password protected files and when transcribed would be anonymised as explained in the study information literature. Prior to interviews I

spent time speaking with each man about the research and my reason for researching the topic. This enabled me to make clear that I invested importance with the research subject (e.g. I was aware of how homosexuality had been pathologised over many decades, the dominant heteronormative discourses around parenting and families and the voices of gay fathers needed to be more clearly heard) and establishing a relationship with the field and participants to ensure validity and reliability of knowledge in producing the subject (Oliver, Serovich and Mason, 2005; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009; Rubin and Rubin, 2012). This made clear to participants that I did not hold negative positions about gay parenting, had no ulterior motive for carrying out the research and wanted to hear how they made sense of their actions in the context of time, place and culture. To ensure that participants had understood what they were providing consent for, a form was designed that required agreement to a number of statements (see appendix D). This included the requirement to agree that: the project had been explained; the expected time commitment; how information provided would be stored and could be used; the right to withdraw consent and data; opportunities for questions to be asked. Overall, 16 participants were recruited as detailed in table 3.3.1.1:

Study Participants				
Respondent	Age	Parenting identity	Number of children	Occupation group
Robert	40s	Single gay father Adoption	1 boy	Professional
Sam	40s	Living with male partner (15 years) Adoption	2 (1 boy, 1 girl)	Professional
Edward	30s	Living with male partner co-parent arrangement	1 girl	Professional
Simon	30s	Single gay father co-parent arrangement	2 boys	Professional

Respondent	Age	Parenting identity	Number of children	Occupation group
Ben	40s	Heterosexual marriage (10 years)	3 (2 boys, 1 girl)	Clerical
Brad	40s	Heterosexual marriage (10 years)	3 girls	Professional
Brendan	50s	Heterosexual marriage (10 years)	2 (1 boy, 1 girl)	Clerical
Dale	60s	Heterosexual marriage (25 years)	1 boy	Professional
Harry	40s	Heterosexual marriage (20 years)	2 (1 boy, 1 girl)	Semi-professional
Karl	40s	Heterosexual marriage (20 years)	2 (1 boy, 1 girl)	Professional
Kyle	60s	Heterosexual marriage (30 years)	2 (1 boy, 1 girl)	Semi-professional
Nigel	40s	Heterosexual marriage (15 years)	2 (1 boy, 1 girl)	professional
Ralph	50s	Heterosexual marriage (20 years)	2 (1 boy, 1 girl)	Professional
Thomas	50s	Heterosexual marriage (20 years)	3 (2 boys, 1 girl)	Professional
Tony	40s	Heterosexual marriage (15 years)	4 (2 boys, 2 girls)	Unemployed
Elliott	30s	2 Heterosexual marriages (5 years each)	2 (1 boy, 1 girl)	Clerical

Table 3.3.1.1: overview of study participants

3.3.2 Constructing the interview schedules

Research interviews are generally described as ranging from open to closed, with qualitative research associated with open interview approaches and quantitative with closed (Crotty, 1998). Over recent years there has been a push for qualitative research when exploring sexuality, particularly with research focused on homosexuality and homosexual identities that goes beyond essentialist notions of a fixed identity (Clarke et al., 2010; Weeks, 2011). The aim was to conduct interviews that focused on how participants made meaning of their subject-positions, subjectivities and how this was influenced by historically, socially and culturally situated power (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000; Aldred and Burman, 2005). In this respect the aim was to collect accounts as part of an active process of interpretation but whilst acknowledging that they are not literal - they reflect an account at a particular time in a particular context (Barriball, 1994). Therefore a semi-structured approach to interviewing was selected to support the collection of accounts on aspects of family, identity and parenting and allow participants to prioritise accounts and actions in a way relevant to them within the interview framework (Ellis, 2007). To allow the voices of each participant to be heard, the approach to question was designed to focus on different identities and how these were positioned overtime (e.g. early and later experiences of sexual identity, as a father, becoming a parent; being gay; managing a gay identity for self and family). Each question gave time for participants to provide an account of their actions and experiences and prompts were used to follow up on accounts provided by participants (e.g. can you tell me more about..., what do you mean by...).

The interview schedules were designed to take place at two time points as it was estimated that each could take approximately 1-1½ hours. This was for manageability reasons as overall the interviews could take over two hours rather than being a requirement of the research design. The first interview was designed to enable participants to provide an account of their family and explore

how they accounted for their varied identities (e.g. do you face any particular challenges as a gay father). It also explored how they positioned their family and managed being gay and a father individually and as a family (e.g. have your children experienced any difficulties because of being in a gay family or having a gay father?) to probe how they constructed their social reality and the position of power between participants and societal institutions (Barriball, 1994; Dillon, 2014). The questions were designed to start broadly (e.g. question one provided an opportunity for participants to talk about their family focusing on a starting point of their choice). This provided a basis and reference point to refer back to during the interview and to focus on meaning as relevant to each participant to ensure relevancy and demonstrate active listening, allow them to be heard and to establish rapport and trust (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Ellis, 2007, Kvale and Svend, 2009). For example, if fathers had not identified publicly as gay for a long period the interaction focused more on how they managed their sexual identity as a straight father publicly and gay man privately. Questions were also rephrased to reflect the number of children, ages and gender, so that interviews were relevant to each respondent and demonstrated interest and respect from the researcher (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009; Rubin and Rubin, 2011). A copy of the interview schedule one is provided in appendix E.

The second interview was designed to cover actions as a family, including introducing a partner to children, interactions with services (e.g. education, social services, health) and how children positioned their family to others (e.g. is your child open with people outside the family home about your sexuality?) . The interview was adapted according to each participant. For example if fathers identified publicly as gay when their children were older interactions with services was likely to be less significant. The question was phrased to reflect this and clarify if it was relevant (e.g. did you have any contact with your child's school after openly identifying as gay?) and followed up accordingly. The second interview also provided an opportunity to probe for further detail and clarify any

points from the first. A copy of the interview schedule two is provided in appendix F.

Feedback on the interview schedule was obtained from two lesbian mothers, one who had parented in a heterosexual relationship prior to identifying publicly as gay and the other who co-parented with her female partner. Both were known to the researcher and selected as they were not part of the study but were gay parents. They were asked to comment on: whether the questions focused on what they would expect; any gaps in the schedule; any areas of surprise in the types of questions raised; whether there was scope for participants to raise issues of importance to them; any other comments. The feedback confirmed that the questions were appropriate and what they would expect. Both commented on how the wording and approach to questions allowed scope for participants to direct the interview towards points they felt as specially relevant to them and how it was evident that the schedule aimed to 'hear' the response of individuals and respond accordingly.

3.3.3 Conducting interviews

Interviews were conducted over a 2½ year period from 2007 into 2010. Given the personal nature of the interviews and considering privacy, participants were asked to indicate where and when they would like interviews to take place. All except one person requested interviews to be conducted at their home. Nine of the participants were interviewed on two separate occasions. The time lapse between interviews varied from two to eight weeks. The difference in time lapse was due to fitting in around other commitments and there was no reason why this would have impacted on the data collection process. The average length of each interview was 1-1¼ hours. The interviews for the other seven participants were combined due to geographical location. For participants where interviews were combined, they were given the opportunity of the interviews being conducted as a whole or with a gap between each interview. Four of the participants requested that interviews be conducted as one long interview and

two opted for a break between interviews. The combined interviews lasted 1¼ -2 hours and the separate interviews 2-2½ hours. The shorter timescale was due to not having to go through consent issues and offer the opportunity for any further question at the start of what would be the second interview. In addition responses to earlier questions often covered aspects of the second interview and it was not necessary for respondent to repeat information to set the context for the discussion. So irrespective of whether accounts were collected in one or two interviews the topics broad topics discussed were broadly similar.

The approach to interviewing adopted in the study gave ample opportunity for participants to provide a full and detailed response to questions and prompts. The interviews were an interaction between the researcher and participants but the content was overwhelmingly from the participants. An opportunity was also provided in all interviews for participants to add any further details, talk about other issues or raise questions about the interview process to ensure they felt their voice was heard (Ellis, 2007). The way questions were asked and interactions in the interviews between the researcher and participants differed in two broad ways: the parenting trajectory; the responses provided in each interview informed later questions. For fathers who had conceived children in a heterosexual relationship the coming out process, both the decision to delay coming out and then the decision to come-out and the disruption this caused was evident throughout the interview and questions were orientated to reflect this. To aid this, very brief notes of key information (e.g. children's names and ages; key dates; key places and events), were made during the interview that could be referred to, to guide subsequent questions, adding an interpretive element to the interviews to increase their relevance and value placed in the process by participants (Legard, Ward and Keegan, 2003). This aided the interview process as I was able to refer to specific points to demonstrate to participants that I had listened carefully to the points and was interested in their

accounts, for example asking a question about one of their children using their name (Rubin and Rubin, 2011).

Prior to each interview time was spent talking to participants about general points to establish rapport and trust (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Hammersley, 2011). Participants were told that they could refuse to answer any questions or break at any point. No respondent refused to provide an answer to a question nor requested a break. There were points during three interviews where participants became visibly upset. At this point, I stopped recording and gave the participant time to make clear how they wanted to proceed. On each occasion the participant made clear their desire to continue the interview. Participants also talked about being upset in positive terms, as the interview reminded them of the difficulties of reconstructing their sexual-identities, but also of how they had overcome the challenges presented by this and now saw their decision to identify publicly as gay as an important self-improvement process that brought positive outcomes. Reflecting on the content of interviews; which often included intimate details about sexual identity, relationship choices, coming out; suggests that a trusted relationship was formed with each participant and they were comfortable and confident that the information they provided would be treated respectfully and reported accurately. Participants commented on how having the opportunity to talk through the construction of their identity as a gay man, even though this had brought challenges they felt a sense of fulfilment and being 'at ease' with themselves now they had publicly identified as gay. In addition, an unintended outcome of the interviews was a perceived therapeutic benefit for a number of participants (e.g. stating 'the interview has made me realise how far I have come'), which has been identified as a potential outcome of research interviews (Murray, 2003; Colbourne and Sque, 2005).

The decision was made to be open about my sexual identity with participants at the start of the process to assist in forming a trusted research relationship and build rapport. Participants often drew on this in their responses as me being able

to understand their reality (e.g. you know what it is like when you are not accepted; things have changed so much in terms of accepting gay men, haven't they) as my identity positioned me as an *insider*, although I remained aware that this did not necessarily equate to a common understanding (LaSala, 2003). In the interviews I avoided making my position explicit, but this sense of being seen as an *insider* was clearly an important part of establishing a trustful relationship, which was productive for both participants and me as the researcher (Colbourne and Sque, 2005; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Importantly, this relationship also enabled me to use the interview process as a way of affirming a positive sense of self for participants with a minority sexual-identity, who may have felt/feel accountable for their minority status by an oppressive society (Weeks, 2011).

Two participants discussed whether they wanted pseudonyms to be used, with one initially stating that he did not want this and would prefer his real name to be used. This was discussed with the participant and I raised concerns about the need to protect the confidentiality of others, who he may refer to in the interview. I was also aware that the discussion would include reference to his children, and there was a duty to protect their anonymity as far as possible. This was acknowledged and we agreed that we would revisit the issue after the interviews were completed. However, I also made clear that I would require him to accept my decision on this issue if there was disagreement between us and if he disagreed, he could of course, exercise his right to withdraw. Reporting this could make it seem that it was a key area of disagreement, however, this was absolutely not the case and it raised interesting, productive and amicable discussion between us. During one of his interviews, the participant referred to a request he had received to contribute to a radio programme about coming out that he had turned it down because of a request from family members, which illustrates how others may be impacted by confidentiality issues. In our discussion of the use of pseudonyms at the end of the interviews, he referred back to this himself and came to the conclusion that there were similarities

between these interviews and the radio request and agreed that they should be used.

Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1996) question whether providing a voice for a specific group could reinforce their construction as 'other'. This point was considered but feedback from participants on the method verified that the project was seen as empowering and avoided the negative connotation of seeing their position as a gay man and father from a deficit perspective. Finally, in addition to allowing an effective relationship between the researcher and the field the method allowed an immediate response to be demonstrated to questions/responses from participants both within each interview and in informing the style of subsequent interviews to avoid any undue distress. Schön (1984) refers to this as reflection in-action and on-action where researchers can 'think on their feet' to react empathetically to emotional responses from participants and reflect on the interview practice with the aim of continual improvement.

3.4 Analysis

3.4.1 Transcription

In deciding the approach to transcription the aims of the research and overarching methodological and analytic framework was considered. Oliver, Serovich and Mason (2005) categorise transcription into two broad forms: naturalism and denaturalism. A naturalism approach involves transcribing the interview in as much detail as possible, for example including all utterances, pauses and gestures. A denaturalism approach involves producing a transcript with the idiosyncratic aspects of the talk removed, such as stutters, pauses and gestures. This approach, while losing the finer detail of the talk still allows meaning to be conveyed and for the researcher to explore how participants account for their constructions of reality (Cameron, 2001). Howitt (2010) argues that when the research aim is focused on macro level analysis, as this study is, a fine grained (e.g. naturalism) approach to transcription is not required.

Considering these points a denaturalism approach to the production of transcripts was selected for this study.

A verbatim transcript of the words spoken was produced for each interview, as advocated by Potter and Wetherell (1987). As explained the words of participants were transcribed but other details such as stutters, pauses and gestures were not included as the data was about the context of the interviews as opposed to the mechanisms of individual conversations (Oliver, Serovich and Mason, 2005). While this excludes details Silverman (2005) argues that no transcript can ever capture every details and the style of transcription should be guided by the overall research study. Any parts of the interview that were inaudible were shown on the transcript by (inaudible) and if participants indicated speech said to another person this was shown by enclosing the phrase in double quotation marks (""). The inclusion of inaudible words was for the benefit of accuracy and speech to others as this could reflect institutional and social practices. All the interviews were transcribed by the study author. Therefore consideration about consistency of transcription approach and style across researchers did not need consideration (Silverman, 2005). Completed transcripts were checked for accuracy by re-listening to the recorded interviews. Care was also taken, when using interview extracts, to include the question participants were responding to, or provide an accurate context for the extract, so that an accurate location for the 'talk' was provided. A sample section of an interview transcript is provided in appendix G.

3.4.2 Data corpus participants

In total there were 16 participants drawn from a broad geographical base covering the South East, South West, Midlands, North England and Scotland. The participants fell into two broad groups: 12 were previously married, had conceived children in their heterosexual relationship and now identified publicly as gay. The remaining four participants identified publicly as gay and subsequently parented. On close reading the differences, in terms of topics

discussed, between fathers who had parented and then identified as gay, compared to fathers who identified as gay and then parented was broad. In addition, the differences in the subject-positions between the later set of interviews was broad. For example in terms of how long they had been in a heterosexual marriage (5-25 years), the number of children, the age of the children (the youngest was 11 and the oldest in their thirties), how long they had kept their gay identity private and their wife's knowledge about their gay identity before and during their marriage. For those who identified as gay and then parented there was also broad variation. One father adopted two children with his male partner. Another father, who was single, adopted a child on his own. The third father, who lived with his male partner, had entered into a co-parenting arrangement with a lesbian couple. The final father had two children from different mothers, one of whom identified as a lesbian and one who was now in a heterosexual relationship. The age of children in these families also differed, with all children being below eight years old. In addition to this variation each of the interviews emphasised different aspects of family life. For example, for the adoptive parents the adoption process, interactions with social workers and other institutions figured heavily. For the father in the co-parenting arrangement the discussions and agreement drawn-up prior to conception of their child about residency, access to family members, what parents would be called, child rearing practices, school choices etc. contributed to significant part of the interview discussions. This presented challenges for managing the corpus of data.

The social context, which is key, positions some subject-positions as more rationale than others (i.e. a subject-position as a straight man is dominantly constructed by institutions as more rationale than that of a gay man) (Burman, 1999; Aldred and Burman, 2005). FDA sees discourse as culturally constructed representations of reality that illustrate rules around what is seen as acceptable and unacceptable practices (e.g. relationships, being a father, marriage and

sexual-identity). This is impacted by power, both from a self-regulatory and societal perspective and makes certain identities, actions and practices possible. For participants the actions and practices for those fathers who entered a heterosexual marriage were informed by heteronormative discourses of acceptability (Heller, 1996; Portwood and Stacer, 2010). Consideration of these factors led to the decision not to include the interview data from the four fathers who had parented after coming out in the analysis. The data collected from these participants is seen as no less valuable and emphasises the diversity, within what may incorrectly be seen as a homogenous group, of men who identify as a gay father. The intention is to disseminate findings from this data corpus, outside of this study, in academic publications. Therefore the data corpus for this study is based on analysis from 12 participants as summarised in table 3.4.2.1:

Respondent	Age	Approximate time married	Interviews (separate or combined)
Ben	40s	10 years	combined
Brad	40s	15 years	combined
Brendan	50s	10 years	separate
Dale	60s	25 years	separate
Harry	40s	20 years	combined
Karl	40s	20 years	combined
Kyle	60s	30 years	combined
Nigel	40s	15 years	separate
Ralph	50s	20 years	combined
Thomas	50s	20 years	separate
Tony	40s	15 years	separate
Elliott	30s	5 years each (2 marriages)	separate

Table 3.4.2.1: overview of participants for study data corpus

The participants all referred to being raised in England or Scotland in two parent households with their mother and father and being from British heritage families. Participants did not display any visible disabilities. One respondent referred to a disability one of his children had that impacted on his son's development. Occupational groups were referred to by all participants in the course of discussion and/or as part of the interview process and covered professional (e.g. teacher), semi-professional (e.g. musician), clerical (e.g. office worker) and one respondent reported being unemployed as detailed in the table above.

3.4.3 Data analysis

Parker (1992) argues that discourses can be seen as frameworks to talk about one type of reality over another and defines a discourse as, 'a system of statements which constructs an object' (pg. 5). Discourse analytic research can be seen in two broad approaches: discursive and Foucauldian, with discursive approaches focusing on micro structures and Foucauldian macro structures (Wetherell, 1998). Hanna (2013) supports this and explains FDA is suited to exploration of macro structures, such as social (i.e. family) and institutional practices (i.e. government positions through legal frameworks, sexual identity). For individuals this is about,

The ways in which the power/knowledge nexus functions to achieve certain subject positions, subjectivities and ways of being (Hanna, 2013, p. 145).

Foucault saw discourse as the rules, divisions, practices, objects and concepts through which bodies of knowledge are formed and this produces positions for subjects. The episteme (how knowledge is historically situated) reflects the state of knowledge of a discourse. Knowledge is situated in a particular culture, place and time and therefore is continually changing. Foucauldian analysis focuses on: genealogical concerns through historical enquiry; mechanisms of power through

the *micro-physics of power* and is directed to practices that create subjects (subjectification). Foucault was interested in how positions held by subjects were regulated and governed from two perspectives: broader historical power that governs human conduct at a distance; and power from individual subjects that imposes self-regulation. Questions such as how does knowledge (which is derived from social practices) organise the conduct, understanding, practice and beliefs to regulate individuals and populations are addressed by Foucault. This position could, to some degree, 'displace' subjects. However, subjects, 'cannot be outside discourse' (Hall, 1997, p. 79) as it is the discourse that produces a place and position for subjects.

Foucauldian analytic approaches focus on subjectivity as the theoretical lens for analysis, which emphasises subject-positions and how these are impacted by technologies of power and self (Payne and Nicholls, 2010). Power is key to these positions as through Technologies of Power and Self can discipline those, through regulation of space, who inhabit what are seen as problematized positions (e.g. gay man, gay father) (Parker, 2013). For example what kinds of expectations shape conduct through privileging certain subject positions and social practices over others (e.g. expecting men to identify as straight to meet hegemonic expectations of masculinity and fathering)? Depending on the context, people can be made accountable for diverging from dominant subject positions. This emphasises how power is a key component for the regulation of space and practices and can 'discipline' those who inhabit particular positions (Parker, 1992; Parker, 2013). This is the case with sexual identity, with heterosexuality being more regulated than homosexuality and, a *straight* sexual identity being less regulated than a gay sexual identity, emphasising the power of situated constructions (Edley, 2001a). Overall the relationship between objects, discourses, actions, subject-positions and subjectivity, and the implications of this for objects, subjects and practices is explored in a Foucauldian inspired approach to analysis (Parker, 2002; Hanna, 2013). Foucauldian analysis explores

the construction of subject-positions, a structure to ground claims of *truth* and responsibility and allow individual management of moral positions in social interactions (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2007). At the first stage of analysis each of the participant transcripts was read several times. With any interview data set there are challenges in managing the data set to identify, as accurately as possible, the key arguments and positions. This challenge is further exemplified with divergent responses (Nikander, 2012).

In addition, a FDA informed approach, is not looking to discover the *truth* as it accepts there are multiple versions of reality and these are dependent on the perspective of the subject, time and place (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Beitin, 2012). Foucauldian analysis is concerned with understanding practices and self-management by focusing on problematisations, technologies, subject positions and subjectification. Davies and Harré (1999) explain subject positions as identifying, 'a location for persons within a structure of rights and duties...' (p. 35). Subject positions provide a way to view reality and the moral location taken up and defended within social interactions and when a position is taken up a person sees the world from that vantage point.

Subjectification offers an insight into how individuals are constructed through power and self. Problematisations draw attention to practices that are seen as problematic. Identifying from accounts what practices are seen as problematic and challenge *official* discourses (which are influenced by and expose power mechanisms) is part of the analytical process. Analysis attends to what problems are foregrounded and involves tracing how discursive practices and formations are constructed and governed. Technologies are about identifying two types of governance: at a political level - Technologies of Power (strategies and operations at a distance from individuals that shape conduct) and - Technologies of Self (self-regulation through self-surveillance and self-discipline). Both technologies occur and interact together to regulate the actions of individuals (Payne and Nicholls, 2010). Technologies are influenced by dominant social and

cultural constructions and discourses. Subject positions are dynamic and multiple and are used to *speak* the *truth* about objects, seeing truth as situated in the social context at a particular time and place (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2007). The analysis is interested in how subjects regulate themselves as traced through the interview data and the ethics of self-formulation. Individuals self-regulate to construct and conform to expectations imposed by self and society. Problematisations, technologies and subject positions influence self-regulation and the ethics that influence this self-formation (Hall, 2001; Willig, 2003).

Foucauldian analysis also focuses on genealogical (historical approach to understand the emergence of social beliefs) enquiry, which is particularly relevant to non-heterosexual identities as the dominant social and cultural construction of homosexuality is stigmatising and pathologising. This position has changed with a more positive legal, medical and moral discursive formations towards homosexuality but this need to be seen in the historical context they emerged from (Carabine, 2001), as discussed in chapter one. The approach challenges the notion of ideology that can exist in mainstream psychology that there is an underlying truth and focused on the link between power and discourse and that participants can be thought of as 'objects of study' (Payne and Nicholls, 2010; Parker, 2013). In contrast, FDA explores how subject positions come into being and how they are maintained and if relevant, deconstructed. This has particular relevance as Drazenovich (2012) argues that the repressive sexual culture, which constructed homosexuality negatively through repressive political, medical and judicial discourses, produces knowledge through language and practices. From these, historical rules and the power inherent in these practices and social institutions, certain identities and practices are privileged over others.

From thorough reading of the transcripts I identified how objects were constructed and maintained and led to the generation of questions and hypothesis as a first step in the analysis approach. Analytic notes were made on

transcripts as a first stage in generating analytic projects across the data corpus (see appendix G). This led to the identification of discursive practices across a set of transcripts with something in common. For example, a number of phenomena around coming out were identified, including descriptions of an initial or growing self-awareness of a non-heterosexual identity; the action of constructing a dichotomous public-private identity position; and managing accountability for not identifying as straight. The way fathers constructed their identity and how certain subject-positions may be legitimised over others (Payne and Nicholls, 2010) was therefore relevant and these analytic projects are identifiable in the data (e.g. constructing a subject-position as a father in a heterosexual relationship and managing the challenge of coming out) situated in heteronormative contexts.

Extracts were manually coded to identify discursive practices and objects. This included examples of extracts that both confirm and/or contradict a phenomenon. I was also aware that the same extract could fit different discursive practices (e.g. father, gay man, marginalised father), so when analytic ideas were being developed, the whole data corpus was used. This stage of the process was both: inductive, where a specific phenomenon in a transcript led to wider identification across the corpus and; deductive, where a broader phenomenon was identified and refined by identification of actions/meaning from the data corpus. At this stage, inductive explanations were evaluated against extracts to establish viability, how objects and subjects were constructed and variation across situated accounts and discursive contexts. Action orientation, in terms of how objects related to each other (e.g. what moral order is privileged; how sexual identity is constructed) was analysed through questioning how objects were positioned (Howitt, 2010; Hanna, 2013).

The data analysis focused on how fathers negotiated their sexual identity and how these positions were regulated for both them and their family through power relations. This involves identification and consideration of what are seen

as acceptable and unacceptable practices and from this, identification of how spaces are created that regulate discursive practices (e.g. homosexual constructions seen as representing 'irresponsible' and heterosexual 'responsible'). This involves asking questions of the data. For example how is accountability claimed/disclaimed? What moral order is privileged? Are certain positions marginalised? How is power resisted? This leads to a focus on how subject positions are evident in the data and how they relate to each other. Within each of these approaches power has to be considered and whether Technologies of Power make occupation of certain subject positions problematic and this regulates actions in different spaces and at different times (Kendall and Wickham, 1999; Aldred and Burman, 2005, Willig, 2008; Payne and Nicholls, 2010) and how these subject positions encourage or constrain subjectivities and ways of being (Hanna, 2013). A final aspect of FDA is consideration of how the relationships between objects, subject-positions, actions and subjectivity and the implications of these for what is seen as meaningful through discursive practices in the data (Kendall and Wickham, 1999; Hanna, 2013).

3.4.4 Validity and reliability

The approach to validity and reliability in interpretative research is significantly different to positivist research, however, it is still vital to show credence to these research processes. A qualitative paradigm, using a constructionist methodology is not aiming to discuss the *truth* as it is about multiple meanings and how these are constructed by individuals (Riggs, 2010). However, questions about how well the phenomena being researched is understood, the reliability of the findings based on the data collected are important. Reliability can be broadly defined as being able to achieve the same results if the study was repeated. Validity is broadly whether a study *measures* what it attempts to and how generalisable the results are. Stenbacka (2001) argues that these concepts, specifically reliability, are not relevant to qualitative research. However, validity can also be thought of as trustworthiness of the research (Golafshani, 2003). The study is

underpinned by a coherent epistemological, ontological and methodological framework, which contribute to the trustworthiness, and consequently, validity of the research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The study contributes to a deeper exploration of the practices of being a gay man and father and managing this over time. This is informed by a systematic and unbiased review of literature to explore the phenomena and an analytic approach to data analysis as outlined in the previous section to provide a systematic framework for the identification and position of subject-positions in the social context and practices they occurred. The ontological positioning also acknowledges that there are multiple versions of reality and this is at least partially grounded in the social context of participants, avoiding a narrow focus on trying to identify the truth or correctness (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009; Rubin and Rubin, 2012)

The accounts help make sense of an under researched topic and make a contribution to knowledge in this area as past research has traditionally concentrated on coming out during adolescence/early adulthood; pathologising a gay identity or comparative studies that aim to justify why being gay and a parent is not problematic for families (e.g. Berkowitz and Marsiglio, 2007; Tuazon and Machine, 2010; Hanssen, 2012). Although there is no attempt or desire for the results to be generalised across broader populations, particularly given the constraints of the participant based as discussed earlier, the overall discourses to emerge from the study provide a basis to reflect on how subjects are generally positioned in models that attempt to explain the coming out process. The relationship between theory and discourses of LGBT, heteronormativity and identity, were utilised to guide the data analysis process and to contribute to understanding of the diversity of families and how they are positioned within dominant social, cultural and political discourses (Dryden, Doherty and Nicholson, 2010).

Summary

This chapter has provided an account of the key decisions that informed the research design, data collection and analysis processes and how these are positioned within a Foucauldian approach. The ethical principles that guided decisions throughout the research process were discussed to clearly show how decisions were made to ensure the integrity of the research and respect for participants. The following chapters apply approaches discussed in this chapter to present the data analysis for the study and identifies the discourses that emerged as part of the analytic process from participant accounts to frame practices and positions.

CHAPTER FOUR

4: The power of heteronormative expectations: Accounting for not coming out

4.1 Introduction

A reality for all previously married fathers who had their children and identified as gay after these events was the impact of powerful heteronormative discourses on identifying openly as gay and forming, what were seen as, legitimate relationships. This raises questions about how the power of heteronormative expectations impacted on fathers not to identify publicly as gay earlier and instead form heterosexual relationships and enter into marriage. All participants regulated their positions, to some degree, as a gay man and father to fit with dominant constructions of heteronormative expectations. For participants, this reality led to concealment and was influenced by different practices and social institutions (e.g. parents, community and religious expectations). These practices and institutions, which overlap, led participants to self-regulate their public sexual identity, as taking up a position as a gay man was not seen as legitimate. Fathers utilised a number of social practices to conceal their gay identity and live according to expected social rules that were created by powerful heteronormative social practices. To achieve legitimacy in their relationships all participants, bar three, positioned themselves in a married heterosexual relationship. For these participants although concealment of their gay identity was not as evident, regulation from social institutions and self, impacted on how legitimate they saw a position as a gay father. This chapter, draws on Foucauldian approaches to analyse how social and institutional practices, situated historically by powerful heteronormative expectations, influences how participants managed their self and practices to position themselves in what were seen as morally acceptable and legitimate relationships and morally acceptable by themselves, others and society.

4.2 Privileging heteronormative practices

During late teenage years and early adulthood there were significant expectations on participants to account for their identity according to dominant heteronormative discourses. This was particularly evident for participants who reached adulthood during the 70s, 80s and early 90s; when social visibility, legal and political frameworks and social institutions were not tolerant of homosexuality. In response to this, participants did not see a subject position as a gay man as an identity open to them. In extract one, Nigel argues a public gay identity was not possible because his family expectations of heterosexuality:

Extract 1

1. Interviewer Do you know during this time Nigel, and it may
2. be you do not know, would you have identified
3. yourself as a gay man?
4. Nigel Never, never, in a million years. I am really
5. clear about that. Never and I think that was the
6. big problem really. Er, 'cause I was surrounded
7. by a family who were at best heterosexist and
8. at worst heterosexist and homophobic. So, it, I
9. think, I mean I've got more issues with my
10. family in the sense that. I mean, I never had
11. this conversation but they knew about my
12. sexuality but did their best to steer me away
13. from it. And, erm, you know, I dunno, I feel
14. mixed about this because can you hear there is
15. a bit of, an angry bit about me in relation to
16. that but then there is another bit of me that
17. thinks, oh, that is just how it was.

Extract one contains a complex account of how Nigel's actions were impacted by the power of heteronormativity in regulating what identities were seen as

acceptable. In response to being asked whether he would have identified as gay, Nigel responds strongly, 'never, never, in a million years' (line 4) and reaffirms this by claiming, 'I am really clear about that' (lines 4 and 5). He constructs his family as heterosexist and/or homophobic (lines 7 and 8) and states that, 'they knew about my sexuality and did their best to steer me away from it' (lines 10 and 11). Nigel argues his family are accountable for him not identifying as gay, but does this through self-regulation, as he 'never had this conversation' (lines 11 and 12). This creates an interesting dilemma where he would never have identified as gay, and no distinction is made between his private or public sexual identity. However, his family are positioned as knowing about his sexuality and did their best to prevent his identifying as gay. Later in the account Nigel distances himself from holding his family solely accountable. He suggests, 'there is a bit of, an angry bit about me in relation to that...' (lines 14 and 15) but retracts from holding his family as solely accountable as it was '...just how it was' (line 16) broadening this to social institutions and the expectation of heterosexuality in the 1970s. This interaction demonstrates the complexity of claiming a public gay sexual identity is influenced by dominant family, cultural and historical expectations. Overall, in the account Nigel provides two contradictory arguments: firstly not identifying as gay but then arguing a subject-position as a gay man was made impossible due to regulation from his family. There was also a lack of any visibly gay people in social interactions and the lack of gay culture (as detailed in extract 2) making a gay identity an unobtainable subject position:

Extract 2:

1. Harry I think you can see the options much more clear
2. these days than when I grew up - in rural
3. Shropshire when the only gay people were
4. Danny La Rue and 'shut that door' Larry
5. Grayson, that was it. That was our role models

6. for gay people and I couldn't understand why I
7. would flush if I saw somebody with their shirt
8. off.

Harry makes a comparison between how he sees things today, compared to when he was younger. This is used to justify his position of not coming out at that point. He explains that the rural location where he lived (line 2) and the lack of any positive role models (i.e. 'the only gay people were Danny La Rue... and Larry Grayson (lines 4 and 5) and negative stereotyping contributed to not feeling able to come out as a gay man. He is clear that he felt attracted to other men and explains that he did not know why he would 'flush if I saw somebody with his shirt off' (line 7). This was a real challenge as there was no accessible gay culture or space that could be drawn on to construct a legitimate position as a gay man. The reference to individuals, such as Danny La Rue and Larry Grayson, who were characterised as camp and comical and lacking reality, was used to argue those who identified in this way were problematic and this was regulated by legal and social practices and rules of heteronormativity. The reality of this was Harry foregrounded a subject-position as a straight man. Further confirmation of heteronormative expectations from societal institutions is provided in extract 3 by Dale:

Extract 3

1. Dale Erm, I've known all my life that I have been that
2. way but because I suppressed it for a long, long,
3. long time in the belief that suppression could
4. get rid of this evil within me. You know, society
5. was against it, the church was against it, family
6. were against it, and friends were against it. Well
7. there was no way I would be for it if everything
8. said no.

Dale explains his homosexual identity as something that he has known about all his life. He constructs his sexual identity, which he refers to as being, 'that way' (line 1) but he suppressed, '...for a long, long, long time' (line 2). A gay identity is constructed as '...the evil within me' (lines 3 and 4) and with the hope, 'that suppression could get rid of this evil within me' (lines 3 and 4). This constructs a gay identity as deviant and differentiating Dale negatively from those taking up heterosexual subject positions. This is differentiated further from acceptable as, 'society was against it, the church was against it, family were against it, and friends were against it' (lines 4 and 5). Dale creates a binary: a straight sexual identity is acceptable and right: in contrast anything associated with a gay sexual identity is regulated as deviant and immoral by social institutions, including family, community and the church Dale defends his position not to foreground his gay identify as, 'there was no way I would be for it if everything said no' (lines 7 and 8). Dale identified as gay but could not be claim this subject position as 'everything' said no, clearly identifying the power of heteronormative expectations. There is no evidence of personal agency here for claiming a gay sexual identity, however, Dale insulates himself from potential criticism as power, through regimes of truth, privileges and sustains heteronormative expectations. In extract 4, Brendan also explains his decision not to claim a gay identity as being influenced by his family and heteronormative constructions of family life:

Extract 4

1. Brendan Erm, I didn't know about being gay, and, and
2. about my own sexuality as such. Until, until I
3. suppose quite late in my life. Erm, we lived in
4. quite a rural area. Erm and I just thought that
5. part of my life, how everybody, that's how
6. everybody lived. That's what everybody did like
7. our little microcosm of family. And, it was

8. something I always thought of wanting for
9. myself. My parents and my grandparents were
10. always quite religious as well and I attended a
11. church school. And (pause) I knew that I was
12. different in some way but I didn't know why. It
13. was not probably, not until I was 15 or 16 that I
14. became aware, not necessarily aware that there
15. was homosexuality, but I had all the religious
16. background that, that was quite wrong really.
17. So I suppose there was quite a lot of
18. suppression going on.

Brendan explains his gay identity was something he did know about, 'until I suppose quite late in my life' (line 2 and 3). He justifies this position with reference to his rural location, reference to the traditional notion of family and religious beliefs. Brendan constructs the heterosexual notion of family by stating, 'that's how everybody lived' (lines 5 and 6) polarising this as the only socially and culturally accepted identity. Brendan presents moral arguments against claiming a non-heterosexual identity, but reduces personal accountability by working up a position of not knowing 'about being gay, and, and about my own sexuality as such' (lines 1 and 2). Later in the account he explains he was aware of his sexual identity but, 'not until I was 15 or 16 that I became aware' (line 14) but retracts from this position by arguing, 'not necessarily aware that there was homosexuality' (lines 15 and 16). This account suggests he did not have full awareness of homosexuality but nonetheless saw occupying a subject position as a gay man as problematic and social institutions as regulating against this. The account constructs a homosexual identity as complex and problematic to his family and community. He refers again to the 'religious background' (line 13) and how this regulates a homosexual identity as something 'quite wrong' (lines 16 and 17). This presents a dilemma: claim a gay identity and not be able to have a

family or; abandon a gay identity to live according to dominant heterosexual norms and be able to have a *traditional* family and children. Similarly, in extract 5, Thomas presents a subject position as a gay man as unavailable historically:

Extract 5

1. Interviewer When you say you couldn't be gay, because?
2. Thomas Well you just couldn't be gay. You couldn't be
3. gay, I couldn't be gay.
4. Interviewer For what reason?
5. Thomas Well that's interesting and obviously what I
6. can't do is travel back into that mind of that
7. 11-12 year old boy I suppose. I was frightened I
8. suppose, terrified what my parents would
9. think. Well I am not even sure I thought of the
10. word gay actually, I am not even sure, because
11. that was like. I mean it wasn't ancient but it
12. was the 1960s. I was actually 11 in 1967 so I
13. was scarcely aware of any of these things

Thomas states that he couldn't be gay but initially gave no explanation for this so was asked for clarification (line 1). In response he repeated three times 'you couldn't be gay' (lines 2 and 3). This response left no space to position his identity as gay, but also gave no justification for this account. When Thomas was asked for clarification of this he provided multiple justifications. He initially responded that he was 'frightened' (line 7) but then clarifies that he was, '...terrified what my parents would think' (lines 7 and 8). He went on to modify his response by explaining that he was, 'not even sure I thought of the word gay actually' (lines 9 and 10). This distances his parents from direct criticism as exploring a non-heterosexual identity is influenced by dominant family values and historically situated social and cultural expectations, as well as dominant constructs of a heterosexual identity. Extracts three and four both position

homosexuality as barely, if at all, visible as an identity to claim, which minimises direct criticism directed towards the participants parents'. Initially both participants construct their family and societal values as restricting their ability to foreground a gay identity. However, the accounts articulate the complexity participants faced if they identified as gay and the accountability this would bring to individuals for occupying a subject position that challenged dominant heterosexual expectations. A tension is evident in the accounts above in terms of how participants foreground their sexual identity to their self (privately) and to others (publicly). This is stated explicitly in extract six by Ralph:

Extract 6

1. Interviewer At what point would you say that you identified
2. as a gay man?
3. Ralph Wow. Well I knew a very long, long time ago
4. but I had a strong mother, a very strong family
5. upbringing. I couldn't do anything about it at
6. that point; it was something that didn't exist
7. for me. It wasn't thinkable

In response to being asked when he identified as gay Ralph responds, 'well, I knew a very long, long time ago...' (line 3), but explains, 'I couldn't do anything about it at that point' (lines 5 and 6). Ralph insulates himself from potential criticism with reference to his 'strong mother' and 'very strong family upbringing' (lines 4 and 5), constructing this as making it impossible to identify openly as a gay man. This implies that his family wielded power that restricted him from occupying a gay subject-position, stating 'it wasn't thinkable' (line 7) at that time and in that culture to identify as gay. This creates a dilemma where Ralph identifies privately as gay but publicly he sees no space to claim a gay identity as an available reality showing how power created a hierarchy of identities, with heterosexuality being privileged. The complexity of foregrounding a gay identity was also evident in Brendan's response in extract seven:

Extract 7

1. Brendan I remember telling them that I thought I was
2. gay... I said I feel as though I have this attraction
3. to men. She said well fair enough. That is
4. absolutely fine. And you know, I [mother] don't
5. have a problem with that. And I spoke to my
6. dad about it, and my dad's a bit like me really,
7. just ignored the fact. Didn't ignore me as such,
8. just said ok, if that's what you want. And he said
9. that's fine. Then a few weeks later he said
10. Brendan you do realise there will be lots of
11. problems in your life. You may have situations
12. where you're not accepted and you may get a
13. lot of discrimination. And I said yes I know, but I
14. am prepared for that. Oh, but yes they were
15. absolutely fine about it.

Over time Brendan moved from exploring his sexual identity privately (as detailed in extract 3) to discussing it with his parents. Their response, while not hostile, did not place a gay identity as being readily accepted. His mother explicitly stated she didn't, '... have a problem with that' (line 40) and his father, '... just said ok, if that's what you want' (line 8). Brendan explained that few weeks later his father stated, '...you do realise there will be lots of problems in your life... situations where you're not accepted... a lot of discrimination' (lines 11-12). This latter response clearly constructs a gay identity as problematic. As a result, this creates a dilemma for Brendan: take up a subject position as a gay man but face potential significant challenges or; background a gay identity and avoid any potential for exclusion and discrimination. Brendan responded that he knew this and was, '...prepared for that' (line 14). However, this confirms that space to explore identity issues were marginalised to within his immediate family

and while his parents showed some support for foregrounding a gay identity, placed acceptance by others and inclusion within society at stake. The response from his father, about potentially negative reaction, also clarified that there may be ‘...lots of problems in your life’ (lines 11 and 12), suggesting that taking up a subject position as a gay man would make him accountable to dominant heterosexual constructions not only now but throughout his life. Brendan resists the power of dominant heteronormative discourses, but clarifies that the choice of identifying publicly as gay was complex and laden with potential difficulties. The accounts above show how the epistemic positioning of homosexuality during the 1970s and 1980s was regulated by power from social institutions and in-turn this leads to self-regulation, which prioritises straight identities over gay identities and provides an insight into how discriminatory constructions are maintained. In extract 8, Kyle accounts for the lack of a visible space during the late 1970s and how this regulated taking up a position of a gay man. He is responding to a request for clarification whether he had suppressed his attraction to other men:

Extract 8

1. Interviewer It sounds as though it wasn't a conscious thing
2. on your part?
3. Kyle No, it wasn't. I didn't go. Yeah, I didn't go. Sort
4. of sports pictures in the papers. If I saw
5. footballers I used to look at the bulges in their
6. shorts and see if they were a bit tasty or
7. whatever so it was there. I always knew it was
8. in the background but it wasn't something that
9. I felt I wanted or needed to do anything about.
10. I hadn't really any experience. I didn't feel
11. confident enough to go to a gay bar. It just
12. wasn't strong enough for me to even

13. contemplate anything like that. You know, it
14. just really never entered my head that I could
15. be gay. I just thought that perhaps all blokes
16. feel this way from time to time and they either
17. do something about it if it is strong enough or
18. they don't.

Kyle presents a complex account of how he identified privately and publicly prior to his marriage. Referring to his attraction to other men Kyle states, 'I always knew it was in the background...' (lines 7 and 8) but that it was not, 'strong enough for me to even contemplate anything like that' (lines 12-13). Karl is acknowledging the conflict between his private and public identity and states he, 'didn't feel confident enough to go to a gay bar' (lines 10 and 11). However, later in the account Kyle states it, '...never entered my head that I could be gay'. This constructs a complex division between his public and private sexual identity that is justified with reference to historical positioning of gay culture, dominant heteronormative expectations and how this regulated his practices and abandons any potential of him identifying as gay. He justifies this by accepting that his attraction to men was, '...always... in the background' (lines 7 and 8), but this may not be unusual as, '...perhaps all blokes feel this way from time to time' (lines 15 and 16). This situates his attraction to other men as something that is perhaps not out of the ordinary, rather than him not having the wherewithal to pursue a gay identity. Similarly, in extract nine, Tony argues even though he had a boyfriend the socio-cultural environment and the lack of visibility of gay men who were not stereotypically 'camp' led him to explain why he did not identify as gay:

Extract 9:

1. Tony I don't think it is so easy now for guys to make
2. excuses about it. The whole gay scene really

3. wasn't that public, especially, outside of big
4. cities. I didn't know anybody that was gay, the
5. gay guys that I knew, erm, Larry Grayson,
6. Freddie Mercury, I didn't associate with. They
7. were nothing like me, I was nothing like them.
8. In my brain, I would think that I can't really be
9. gay because that's what gay people are like, as
10. camp as tits, wear frocks and things so to my
11. way of thinking, even though I had had a
12. boyfriend for a couple of years I didn't consider
13. myself gay. I just thought it was different

Tony, similar to Harry in extract 2, asserts that, the whole gay scene really wasn't that public' (lines 2 and 3). However, he also states at the start of the extract the complexity of how the socio-cultural environment at a particular time problematised some subject positions (e.g. homosexual) over others (e.g. heterosexual) which made these unavailable compared to how things are easier today for men to identify as gay by stating, 'I don't think it is so easy now for guys to make excuses about it' (lines 1 and 2). This explanation offers no alternative to heteronormative expectations, but he justifies this with reference to the lack of openness, awareness and visibility of gay people and a gay culture in the 1980s. Tony constructs a complex dilemma by claiming: 'I had a boyfriend for a couple of years' (lines 11 and 12) but, 'I didn't consider myself gay' (lines 12 and 13). Tony justifies this position as he, '...didn't associate with' (line 6) and saw himself as completely different to the camp characters he had watched on television and on that premise did not identify himself as gay.

The lack of an accessible gay culture, visibility of other gay men, or support for a gay identity led Nigel, Kyle and Tony to keep any consideration of a gay identity private and construct a position of being a straight man following heteronormative expectations. During the late 1970s and 1980s HIV and AIDS

emerged and this was frequently referred to as the 'gay plague'. This impacted on the public discourse of gay men and consequently the rules and practices that produce the subject position of gay men. The rules and divisions of occupying a subject position as a gay man are clearly articulated by Harry, recounting his position in the 1980s in the context of public feeling that made identifying as a gay man problematic. In extract 10, in response to being asked if he would have occupied a different subject position if there had been less negativity around HIV and AIDS, Harry explains:

Extract 10

1. Harry It was the early 80s and I worked in the theatre
2. and loads of people I knew were dying and AIDS
3. was just coming onto the scene... And because
4. people were dying there was a huge backlash
5. against gays in the media. It was all anti-gay and
6. everything, you know it was all your own fault
7. and you deserve it, this sort of stuff. I think part
8. of it, might have just been, I was just, I couldn't
9. bring myself to live as a, a gay man because it
10. would be a terrible life.

Harry explains, '... loads of people I knew were dying' (line 2). These people had been infected with HIV and were dying from AIDS and in this context there was, 'a huge backlash against gays in the media' (lines 4 and 5). Harry constructs this as presenting a challenge to how he foregrounded his sexual identity publicly as the social, cultural political environment disempowered him and explains how he, '... couldn't bring myself to live as a gay man' (line 8). Harry made sense of this backlash by constructing the idea of living as a gay man as equating to a, 'terrible life' (line 10). At that point he had a dilemma, live a terrible life as a gay man and experience the stigma he associated with a subject position as a gay man constructed by dominant heteronormative constructions. The years

following this saw a gradual improvement in the political positioning of homosexuality, however this is not automatically associated with more social tolerance and the power of social and self-regulation continued to construct heterosexual subject-positions as more acceptable. The impact of self-regulation, is clearly explained by Ben, in extract 11. He was explaining how he currently socialises with gay men and seemed to suggest practices associated with his gay and fathering identities were intentionally kept separate. Clarification of this was sought:

Extract 11

1. Interviewer You said if you socialise yourself you will often
2. tend to socialise with other gay men, are they
3. two parts of your life that tend to be separate?
4. Ben Yes they tend to be separate, erm, people have
5. sort of said, well there is the gay men's group
6. with the LGBT group, it's not something that, I
7. don't want to make it an issue. I know some
8. people that have made it an issue and it has
9. become very, I don't know, I look at it and think,
10. now you are making an issue of you being gay
11. and a parent. I just want a normal life as much
12. as possible and if it means keeping them
13. separate I will.

Ben's account, which focused on managing his positions as a gay man and father clarifies that although the social, legal and political practices and rules are more accepting of homosexuality and in many areas place gay rights as equal to heterosexual rights, the impact of historical heteronormative expectations, are still evident. Ben constructs an argument of not, '...making an issue of you being gay and a parent' (lines 10 and 11) and just wanting a 'normal life' (line 11). To manage this he accepts that if he has to keep these two aspects of his identity

separate – as a gay man and father – then he will do that. The account foregrounds a subject position as a gay father as problematic and to manage this Ben explains how he keeps them separate if that is what is required. This suggests that social, legal and political changes during the first decade of the new millennium, while bringing more equality for gay men, do not automatically challenge the epistemic positioning of homosexuality. Historical constructions of homosexuality situate it as deviant and inferior in comparison to heterosexuality, are clearly evident in Ben’s account and suggests internalised shame and/or homophobia are impacting on his social actions. In extract 12, Elliott explains how the impact of historical constructions remains and impact on his position as a gay parent:

Extract 12

1. Interviewer When you and Jack have the children do you
2. feel you are seen the same and get supported
3. in the same way as when you were married?
4. Elliott I feel funny myself sometimes ... it's silly, like
5. most of the time I feel like it's normal but then
6. odd time, I get this feeling, feeling that it's a bit
7. odd, you know like set up the situation. I don't
8. know, I think it's just because, erm, it's just
9. how you're brought up to think like it's a
10. couple, it's a couple that bring kids up and like
11. you're brought up to think that two men or
12. two women aren't supposed to be together as
13. such sort of thing.

Elliott articulates the complexity of his subject-position as a gay father and acknowledges a moral dilemma he has with being a gay parent. At times he gets a ‘feeling that’s it’s a bit odd’ (lines 6 and 7) and how dominant heterosexual constructions of family life contribute to him, however momentarily, internalised

homophobia for violating expected constructions of parenting and family.

Although he identifies as a gay man he explains how heteronormative expectations are ingrained in him, which leads to him questioning whether his practice as a father is legitimate as a gay man.

Social, cultural, community, religious as well as family factors all add to the complexity of foregrounding a gay identity. It was not as simple as them identifying as gay, as these factors exert powerful influences that would place significant levels of accountability for not identifying as straight. A position is constructed where the lack of a visible gay culture, lack of role-models, lack of social acceptability, lack of family support and together these maintain dominant heterosexual expectations, which during early adult life participants felt unable to challenge. Extracts 1-10 construct the challenges of identifying as gay, in the context of social, familial and cultural problematizing a homosexual identity and how individuals position their sexual identity privately and publicly. In addition to the influence of families, who positioned homosexuality at best as difficult and exclusionary and at worst immoral and deviant in the 1960s and 1970s and this was amplified with the emergence of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s.

These dominant constructions created powerful expectations for individuals to identify as straight as opposed to gay. This confirms that the decision to come-out is not an individual essentialist action, but impacted by a complex interaction between the individual and their socio-cultural environment, which is dynamic and historically positioned. There was a choice but the consequences of making the 'wrong' choice in that context, namely foregrounding an identity as a gay man, was seen as fraught with dangers that fathers felt unable to manage. The power of heteronormativity, sustained through family, community and political institutions, is evident in extracts 11-12 for Ben and Elliott in their current practices as a gay father. While recent political positioning of homosexuality has moved towards equality heteronormative expectations remain and impact on how being a gay father is constructed by these participants as less legitimate

than being a straight father. This confirms how genealogical concerns (e.g. legal discourses of homosexuality, religion and HIV/AIDS) and heteronormative power create a discourse of privileging heteronormative practice and to problematise a subject-position as a gay man and subsequently gay father.

4.3 Gaining legitimacy through heterosexual relationships

The impact of dominant heterosexual expectations led participants to construct a heteronormative view of how families should be, which in turn influenced their views on marriage and getting married. To maintain ongoing legitimacy as a straight man the next expected step was to form a relationship with a woman and eventually marry. This presented complex challenges for participants who were attracted to other men and this placed them in one of two groups: those who married without their wife knowing of a potential gay identity or; those who knew their husband was attracted to men or had had a gay relationship prior to marriage. Brad, Karl, Brendan, Harry and Tony explained their wives were aware of their attraction to men prior to or early in their marriage. Dale, Kyle, Nigel, Ralph and Thomas did not disclose any sexual attraction to other men, to their wife before marriage. For participants whose wives knew of their attraction to other men before they married this covered a range of relationships. Brendan, met his future wife when they developed a close friendship and was open about his sexuality with her. Within the varied constructions of partnerships a practice emerged of gaining legitimacy through forming heterosexual relationships.

Brendan identified as gay and as discussed in extract 7 had been open with his parents about this. There was implicit acceptance of his identity but also saw it as problematic and in society as likely to expose him to ongoing discrimination for violating heteronormative expectations. The power of these expectations positioned a gay identity as unavailable to Brendan as explained in extract 13:

Extract 13

1. Brendan She has known all along that I was gay. But I
2. didn't want to enter a, erm... a gay lifestyle. I
3. know lots of gay men who are very
4. promiscuous and that doesn't appeal to me.
5. Erm, I knew there were gay couples, but I
6. couldn't imagine myself at that stage in a gay
7. relationship. And I suppose a lot of it, a lot of it
8. was about an emotional immaturity and naivety
9. because I still thought, thought for a long time
10. that life was about almost aping [mirroring]
11. how my own, own childhood had been, how my
12. parents, you know, my own upbringing. And
13. that's how I wanted my life to be.

As detailed in extract 7, in Brendan's discussion with his parents, his father raised the potential challenges of foregrounding a subject-position as a gay man and Brendan stated he was ready for these. However, in extract 13 he explains how the women he was friends with had, '...known all along I was gay' (line 1) but he, 'couldn't imagine myself at that stage in a gay relationship' (lines 6 and 7). He justifies this as due to his 'immaturity' and 'naivety' of wanting to have a family that was similar to his upbringing. At that point he had tensions between the subject-positions of gay man and father and did not see these two realities as being compatible with each other. This presented a dilemma, where he openly identified as gay to his family and his close female friend, but did not want to attach his identity to that category as he sees this position as excluding him from family life and the potential to be a father. This was made more complex by his perception of a gay lifestyle, which he categorised as promiscuous and not being able to 'imagine' himself in a gay relationship. Taking up a position as a gay man is foregrounded as problematic through Brendan's perceptions of how gay

relationships were and not seeing any scope to have a gay relationship that was different to this. Brad's wife was aware of his attraction to other men as he had same-sex relationships prior to marriage. However, in extract 14 he explained how his marriage, which had lasted 15 years ended:

Extract 14

1. Brad She had got to go off to work and holidays we
2. were supposed to have she would say she was
3. going on walks and whatever, but she wasn't,
4. she was going off with her new boyfriend or
5. whatever. Things like that. So that brought it to
6. a dramatic end otherwise I think we would still
7. be married now, but just living the lie.

The account was provided in response to a question about his relationship with his wife. Brad explains that their marriage was brought to an end as his wife, 'was going off with her new boyfriend' (line 4). He identified as gay but to others he occupied a subject position as a straight married man and constructed his relationship with his wife as, 'just living the lie' (line 7). However, if it had not been for his wife's infidelity he explains, 'I think we would still be married' (lines 6 and 7). His marriage provides an acceptable heteronormative construction and even though he identified as gay. Being married offered a way of framing what was seen as an acceptable subject position and discursive practice as a straight man and was seen as legitimate. In extract 15 Karl also provided an account of the legitimacy offered by heterosexual marriage as being an acceptable space to raise children:

Extract 15

1. Karl My parents are not rolling in cash but they are
2. not without money and I thought, you know, if I
3. was going to have children, it was important

4. that they were actually recognised as, a
5. legitimate issue, for want of a better word. We
6. thought, it all gave it a nice feel to it. And her
7. parents were decidedly jumpy about the whole
8. thing. And I suppose the fact that I was actually
9. prepared to commit myself to marriage, there
10. must be something in it. So we took that
11. conscious decision that we would get married
12. and then we'd have children.

Karl justified his decision to marry as 'it was important...' (line 3) that his children were seen as, 'a legitimate issue, for want of a better word' (lines 4 and 5). He locates marriage as giving 'a nice feel' (line 7) to having children and suggests his wife agreed with this. Karl takes an active role in forming a relationship that was seen as acceptable to others for raising children. There is no reference to love between him and his wife, but Karl addresses this by explaining, 'I was actually prepared to commit myself to marriage, there must be something in it' (lines 9 to 11). The phrase, 'something in it' implicitly acknowledges that this is perhaps an unusual approach to marriage, but positions him as offering commitment in some form and protecting him from criticism for this position from his wife and parents who, 'were decidedly jumpy about the whole thing'. Taking up a position as a married man is managed as a moral act for the sake of children, part of his duty as a father to provide a stable location and this was seen as within a heterosexual marriage as this carried social legitimacy. Similarly, Harry reported that his wife had some knowledge of his gay identity before marriage as detailed in extract 16. Harry had explained that he split from his girlfriend (later his wife) and during the split had had a relationship with men:

Extract 16

1. Interviewer And in that sense, did, thinking about your
2. wife, splitting up, did she know why?
3. Harry Yes, she did. She, she knew that I at least had
4. gay tendencies before we married because we
5. split up and I had a year where I had
6. relationships with men and for some reason
7. which I can't quite work out, well I can, well
8. there's lots of reasons. We got back together
9. again and I got married and that was 22 years
10. ago now

Harry explained that between meeting his wife and them marrying there was a year when they were apart and during this year he, 'had relationships with men' (lines 5 and 6) providing justification that she knew about his attraction to men. He softens this position from claiming she knew he identified as gay by referring to knowing he had gay tendencies (lines 3 and 4). For Harry identifying as gay was morally questionable, whereas referring to gay tendencies allows him to construct a version of reality that avoids him having to occupy this regulated position. When discussing splitting up from his future wife, Harry explained, 'there were lots of reasons' (line 8) why they split up, however he demonstrated limited evidence of self-management in his claim that he, '...can't quite work out' why they split up. He summarised getting back together, getting married and staying married for 22 years very succinctly. Harry explained, 'I got married' (line 9), constructing the practice of marriage as a functional rather than romantic act. Similarly, Tony had been in a relationship for two years with another man and then met the woman he went on to marry as detailed in extract 17:

Extract 17

1. Tony I was with a guy for two years, we split up, and
2. within a couple of weeks I met the woman I
3. was going to marry, the only woman I had ever
4. been with. And, and it was just so ridiculously
5. easy. Erm, home life at the time was extremely
6. difficult, my sister's marriage had just split up,
7. my parent's marriage had just collapsed. Um, I
8. was on the rebound and it was almost
9. inevitable that something was going to
10. happen.
11. Interviewer Yeah
12. Tony You know, so 14 years of marriage and 4 kids
13. happened

Within two weeks of splitting from the man he was in a relationship with Tony explained, 'I met the woman I was going to marry' (lines 2 and 3). Tony accounted for this time as being, '...just so ridiculously easy' (lines 4 and 5), presenting him almost as passive in the construction of his relationship. He made an explicit link with his sister's relationship ending (line 5), his parents' marriage ending (line 7) and him starting a heterosexual relationship. He presented a version of reality where 'it was almost inevitable that something was going to happen' disclaiming accountability for his decision to marry. A position is created where he constructs himself as having no alternative but to pursue a straight identity, have a relationship with a woman and go on to marry as a result of these other family events. Even though he had been in a relationship with another man for two years the inevitable outcome is presented the socially and morally accepted and expected heterosexual relationship. His parents' and sister's marriages had ended so to maintain some moral order marriage is

constructed as the only acceptable practice. These dominant heterosexual constructions are also evident in Dale's account in extract 18:

Extract 18

1. Dale Well there was no way I would be for it if
2. everything said no. So we lived a life, a married
3. life, and by most standards a relatively happy
4. life.

Dale constructs a situation, referring to his gay identity, where, 'there was no way I would be for it' (line 1) as family, his community and cultural expectations were all heteronormative. The power of dominant heteronormative discourses expected a man to have a heterosexual relationship and subsequently marry. Homosexual practices are disciplined and problematised, which makes a subject position as a gay man unavailable. Dale kept his gay identity, which he was aware of from a young age (as detailed in extract 3), private and justified this by reference to heteronormative discourses. The implication of taking up a subject position as a married (heterosexual) man is inconsistent with an identity as a gay man but Dale constructed his marriage as providing, 'a relatively happy life' (lines 3 and 4). There is no expression of personal happiness, evidence of a right to choose a homosexual identity or explicit consideration of his wife. The power of heteronormative social institutions constructs heterosexual marriage as the expected position and this regulates his actions to focus on achieving this. This is similar to the position of Thomas and Ralph in extracts 6 and 7, who justified their decision not to come out at that point because parents and a 'strong family upbringing', which made a gay public identity unthinkable. For Kyle, in extract 19, the power of heteronormative expectations are evident again:

Extract 19

1. Kyle And it wasn't as if I had an aversion to girls, I just
2. enjoyed what George and I had been up to,

3. obviously very secretly, but again I had no one
4. to talk to, to find out if everybody had these
5. feelings. So I convinced myself that it was a
6. phase, I was doing a bit of experimenting. But
7. the main reason as I mentioned to you before
8. was, I always got on well with kids, I felt that I
9. wanted kids, so to me the obvious route was to
10. date girls.

Kyle acted on the feelings he had for another man but did not have the support at that time to claim a public subject position as a gay man as there was, 'no one to talk to, to find out if everybody has these feelings' (lines 4 and 5). In the account he makes clear how he 'enjoyed' the relationship with George but also wanted to be a father. At the time these two positions seemed polarised and the dilemma was that foregrounding a gay identity would make a position as a father and make him accountable for violating expected heteronormative norms. This is made clear in his account as he referred to how his relationship with George had been conducted, 'obviously very secretly' (line 3), which positions this as wrong and against the norms of society. Taking up a position as a gay man, where practices are governed by heteronormative norms, would leave an individual exposed to social discipline. To avoid this the only option, through self-management was to create a reality that fitted heteronormative norms, namely parenting via the practice of marriage. Kyle justifies the moral position he took by stating, 'it wasn't as if I had an aversion to girls' (line 1). The power of heteronormative norms, which privileged heterosexual relationships made homosexuality in his community, at that time, invisible. He made a choice, but the choice was made in the epistemic context of homosexuality as a deviant practice and consequently there being no visible space for a gay identity. The desire to be a parent was also a major factor for Harry's identity, in extract 20:

Extract 20

1. Harry I did want kids. Erm and the relationship was ok,
2. I was not allowed to say, well it wasn't that I
3. was not allowed to, I was going along with the
4. whole pretence as well that, that the whole gay
5. thing was gone and now I was a straight male in
6. a yeah, you know, in a family situation. But
7. obviously it never went away I just thought I
8. could put a lid on it.

Harry constructs a version of reality where he was following heteronormative expectations but refers to this as, 'the whole pretence' (line 4). He locates his wife as managing his identity and initially displays self-management, inoculating himself from any criticism that could be made of his position. However, he contradicted this by stating, 'well it wasn't that I was not allowed to' (line 3), but then restated how he was, 'going along with the whole pretence' (lines 3 and 4). The pretence of identifying as a straight man is built around heteronormative social institutions and self-regulation as Harry sees this as the only available space. He links this course of action with a binary of being in a heterosexual family situation or being able to pursue his sexual identity as a gay man. He places himself on the heterosexual-homosexual binary, which prioritises heteronormative practices and problematises homosexual practices and passively declaring he has tried it [gay relationship] but now, 'the whole gay thing was gone and now I was a straight male...' (lines 4 and 5). Extracts 15-20 show how family influences, from parents, wider family or partners; led participants to foreground a public identity as a straight man, even though they identified as gay or expressed sexual attraction to other men. This position was influenced by dominant heterosexist attitudes and in some cases direct homophobia. As a result participants were left with two options: identify as gay and risk alienation from their families and on-going exclusion or; follow dominant heteronormative

expectations that influence self-regulation and have the acceptance of their families and social institutions, such as fathering, remain open to them.

Social and cultural identity, which focused on the expectation of heterosexuality, led participants to background their gay identity. Powerful social institutions locate heterosexuality as the norm and expected participants to take up and maintain a position as a straight man. These expectations were influenced by varied constructions including; the negative legislative positioning of homosexuality; public attitudes of the 1960s, 70s and 80s; and the lack of visible and accessible spaces to foreground a gay identity. For Thomas, in extract 21, he explains his concern that others were starting to question his sexual identity and the need to respond to act to address this suspicion:

Extract 21

1. Thomas But I think as regards marriage and parenthood
2. I think I was worried about people thinking I
3. was gay not least because a few people asked
4. me if I was gay in my 20s. And of course I said
5. no, including to one girl friend. But I suppose I
6. just assumed that people should get married
7. and should, and would have children. And I
8. guess if I am honest if I didn't get married
9. people might think I was gay and I didn't get
10. married until I was nearly 30, so relatively late
11. for those days at least, which was the 1980s.

Thomas explains his marriage allowed him to take up a legitimate position as a straight man and avoid people, 'thinking I was gay...' (lines 2 and 3). He felt accountable to heteronormative norms and could not contemplate identifying as openly gay. The potential problems of identifying as gay was heightened by, 'a few people thinking I was gay' (line 3) and this was not seen as a morally

acceptable identity. Thomas responds to this by stating, 'of course I said no' (lines 4 and 5), which situates a public gay identity as problematic and unacceptable. This constructs a moral binary between his public and private identity, with a homosexual identity foregrounded as problematic. Thomas demonstrates limited agency as he explained he did not get married until he was almost 30, which was 'relatively late for those days at least' (lines 10 and 11) but went ahead with marriage to counteract anyone thinking he may be gay. The implication of positioning himself as a straight married man, which is completely inconsistent with his private identity, is seen as preferable to disclosing his gay identity. Referring to his age, Thomas presents getting married as though there was no alternative to meet the heteronormative expectations he felt accountable to. The decision to marry was often intricately linked with having children and being a father, as detailed in extract 22:

Extract 22

1. Tony I don't know if you had a mum and dad and
2. grew up normally, but I think we all, well I don't
3. do it because I make a point of not doing it, but
4. a lot of parents do the whole, "well you wait
5. until you are grown up and have kids of your
6. own" and so sort of, it's almost like brain
7. washing. You are just programmed to think well
8. I am going to grow up and have kids of my own.
9. And to sort of go against that in your mind, well
10. if I choose to have kids, well that's natural, so
11. when the opportunity arose I just took it.

Tony's account emphasised the power of heteronormative discourses and how they start to impact throughout childhood and set out that individuals should form heterosexual relationships. Tony poses a question about growing up 'normally' and how parents may make statements to their children about being,

'...grown up and have kids of your own' (lines 5 and 6) suggesting heterosexual marriage and parenting as legitimate, compared to any other relationship as the only option. He explains this type of expectation as 'brain washing' and how it locates a non-heterosexual identity as a problematic moral position that will make those who claim it accountable for violating heterosexual norms. Tony refers to being, 'programmed to think' (line 7) that growing up will automatically lead to a relationship with a person of the opposite sex, forming a relationship, possibly marriage and then having children. This accountability can come from power of social institutions and can be either implicit (i.e. being surrounded by mainly heterosexual constructs; parents talking about having grand-children; religious expectations) or explicit (consistent reference by a parent to their child growing up and marrying; outright homophobia; legal and medical discourses problematising homosexuality) and pursuing these expectations is seen as 'natural' (line 10). For Tony when the opportunity to follow these heteronormative expectations arose he, 'just took it' (line 11). This, along with his account in extract 12, emphasises the power of dominant identity and relationship positions creating heterosexual realities and the difficulty of challenging these dominant constructs.

The negative genealogical positioning of homosexuality governed what was seen as acceptable and these contributed to family, societal and cultural views that positioned homosexuality as abnormal and deviant. This challenge, from social and cultural values, is also relevant to Nigel in the early part of the 1970s:

Extract 23

1. Nigel One of them is that I felt attracted to persons of
2. the same sex. And the second one was I knew I
3. wanted to be a father. So on the face of it,
4. especially at that moment in time, would have
5. been about 1971, those two things felt utterly
6. irreconcilable.

Nigel argues being attracted to men and being a father is problematic as the, 'two things felt utterly irreconcilable' (line 5). The way he constructs this binary leaves no doubt that he had a stark choice where either one or the other were possible but not both. In extract 1 Nigel described his family as heterosexist and potentially homophobic, but sets this in the context of genealogical societal views and expectations of the time. From his perspective this left no space for a gay identity but he constructs this reality as acceptable in the context of the time - 1971, where the view they held was not counterintuitive to how homosexuality was regulated by many individuals and societal institutions. For Nigel, the outcome of this was that he backgrounded his gay identity and publicly positioned himself as a straight man, which allowed a space to be a father. For participants who identified as gay in adolescent/early adulthood and wanted to be fathers a clear binary was evident: you could be gay or you could be a father, but not both as evident in extracts 19-23. In addition, the dominant heteronormative constructions of adult sexual identity saw being straight, married and having children as normal compared to the deviant and abnormal position of identifying as gay.

The positioning of homosexuality as immoral in the 1960s and 70s had renewed emphasis linked to HIV and AIDS in the 1980s and created powerful expectations of men positioning their identity as straight. Foregrounding a gay identity, which is regulated as immoral, would make men accountable to family, community and broader social institutions (e.g. laws and politics) and accepted social practices associated with these. This dilemma is clearly articulated by Harry in extract 24 and how the desire to be a father led to self-regulation of sexual identity:

Extract 24

1. Harry I, erm, it is very difficult to think back and think
2. if there was no AIDS issue, if there was anti, no
3. homophobia then would that have made a
4. difference, possibly it would have done, it's still
5. hard to say. But I did want kids
6. Interviewer Right
7. Harry I did want kids. My choice was to have a
8. normal life.

Harry explains that it is, 'difficult to think back' (line 1) with complete clarity to the influences on his decision to marry and have children. However, he also refers to AIDS and homophobia (line 2 and 3), which he constructs as negative factors for any man considering identifying publicly as gay, in his decision about the public identity he constructed and how this influenced his life course over a number of years. He also clearly states, 'but I did want kids' (line 5) and reconfirms this in line 7. Harry manages a moral dilemma where a more tolerant environment of homosexuality may have led him to foreground his gay identity but the desire for children was not seen as an available as a gay man. Therefore to be a father required self-regulation of sexual identity to foreground a straight identity and live, 'a normal life' (lines 7 and 8). Again, even though he identifies as gay, foregrounding a subject position as a gay man is problematic through self-regulation impacted by powerful heteronormative social institutions. A strong desire for children is also evident in Karl's account in extract 25:

Extract 25

1. Interviewer Do you know in terms of, well I am thinking
2. about what you said, was it a strong desire to
3. have children and be a father?
4. Karl Yes, very much so.

5. Interviewer I was thinking that.
6. Karl Yes. I couldn't tell you what it was precisely but
7. I always, I always, even when I was in a gay
8. relationship, my first serious gay relationship,
9. when I was 18-19, I had this image in my mind
10. of this little blonde haired boy that would be
11. my boy and fortunately, nine or ten years ago
12. he turned up.

Clarification was requested from Karl to confirm his strong desire to be a father and he responded by stating, 'yes, very much so' (line 4). Karl explains his desire for children alongside what he describes as, 'my first serious gay relationship' (line 8). However, in terms of his desire to be a father, his response, 'even when I was in a gay relationship' (lines 7 and 8) suggests he saw identifying as gay as making a subject-position as a father unavailable. In his early adult years, when Karl was in a relationship with another man, he constructed being a father as an, 'image in my mind...' (line 9) and states, 'fortunately nine or ten years ago now he turned up' (lines 11 and 12), within his heterosexual marriage. In extract 15 Karl justifies his decision to marry as ensuring his children were legitimate and as it 'gave a nice feel to it' (line 7). There is no reference in either extract to the relationship between him and his wife, suggesting his marriage was a practice to conceive and raise children within the dominant expectation of a heterosexual marriage. Karl's desire for children is achieved but to do this he felt unable to foreground a gay identity. This is similar to Kyle in extract 14, where his desire to be a father left the only path to pursue was a heterosexual relationship. To justify this Kyle, in extract 19, positions his relationship with a man while at college as a, phase and as incompatible with his desire for children and this led him back to the 'obvious route' – to date girls. As well as the desire to be a father being an important factor in the decision to marry it also morally acceptable to demonstrate on-going commitment to their family. In all cases except one

(Brendan and his wife had entered marriage to provide a family structure for their children who were conceived through assisted technology) this commitment, which participants presented as a necessary and important practice in their subject-position as a father, led to fathers remaining in their married relationship and family home for a number of years. This is clearly articulated in extract 26 by Brad. Brad's account follows on from him explaining that the relationship between him and his wife was not progressing well and others may wonder why he continued.

Extract 26

1. Brad Sounds weird, sounds stupid, some people may
2. say. But I was committed, it was the family,
3. everything was protected around the children
4. and she knew that I would do anything for the
5. kids. The kids were my be all and end all. I did
6. everything for the kids.

He explained that it could sound 'weird' and 'stupid' (line 1) that they remained together, but he justified this through his commitment as, 'everything was protected around the children' (line 3). Brad states, 'she knew I would do anything for the kids' (lines 4 and 5), displaying ongoing commitment to maintaining his family. He argues he did his best to be a committed father and prioritised this over his gay identity, which was seen as a morally incompatible position with being a father. However, Brad positions his children as, 'my be all and end all' (line 5), which minimises the commitment displayed to his wife and their marriage. This demonstrates the complexity of his relationship and the challenge of managing identities that are positioned as incompatible by dominant heteronormative expectations of family and fathering. Thomas did not express the same strong desire to have children when he was younger. However, as detailed in extract 21, he had become concerned that some people, including one girlfriend, had asked him if he was gay. This went against the

heteronormative expectations that he was surrounded by, which from his perspective, made foregrounding a gay identity as an unavailable subject-position. Part of maintaining a credible straight identity was being married and having children, as detailed in extract 27:

Extract 27

1. Interviewer Thinking about you being a parent, did you
2. always have a desire to be a father?
3. Thomas No, I wouldn't say I did. The whole, whole
4. marrying and fatherhood thing, is like another
5. thing what I was aware of when I was very
6. young. Erm, what was really going through my
7. mind and it is a hard thing. Well I suppose a lot
8. of gay people; I think a lot of gay people would
9. understand, like to be in the closet for some
10. time of their adult lives.

Thomas explained in extract 27 how he felt accountable to act according to powerful heteronormative expectations to avoid being disciplined for taking up a subject position as a gay man. He accounts for the expectation to marry and father children, which was present from, 'when I was very young' (lines 5 and 6) and contrasts this with his emerging sexual identity. This created a binary – foreground a gay identity, or marry and have children – and his decision was the latter. However, the account confirms that this was not straightforward for Thomas. The accountability created by his family and the community to identify as straight was powerful and impacted on what identities he saw as available. This emphasises the complexity of sexual identity and how the decision is impacted by varied social institutions and something that is often thought of as a choice, which is multifaceted and complex, with competing moral positions operating to regulate the positions that are seen as available. At the time Thomas took this decision the legislative and social climate was not supportive to

being gay and the option to be a father as a gay man was seen as simply non-existent.

4.4 Summary

This analysis identifies how participants draw on a discourse of heteronormativity to frame their practices and positions; impacted by both self-management and social institutions. Family pressure, through heteronormative expectations, from strong family members, religion, community and the lack of gay culture regulated available positions by privileging heterosexuality. This isolated participants and there was no acceptable space to take up a subject position as a gay man. For the majority of participants the formation of a sexual identity in adolescence and early adulthood took place during the 1960s, 1970s or early 1980s. This historical period was often signified by a hostile atmosphere towards homosexuality. For much of the 1960s and 70s homosexual relationships were problematised and went against dominant heteronormative expectations. In the 1980s, negative messages towards resurfaced as a result of HIV and AIDS and homosexuality was reinforced as an immoral practice. For participants this created rules that privileged heterosexual constructions of family and fathering and subjects regulated their practice according to dominant heteronormative rules.

These rules had an impact on the identities that participants felt were open to them. All participants who identified privately with a homosexual sexual identity considered the potential to take up a subject position as a gay man. However, dominant heteronormative social constructions positioned a gay identity as unobtainable and consequently taking up a straight position provided legitimacy and constructed subjects in an accepted rather than problematic way. The desire for children for a number of participants also contributed to this position, as being openly gay and being a father were seen as completely contradictory and unavailable positions to occupy simultaneously. This, along with invisibility of

a gay-culture, led participants to follow what was seen as the 'normal' and expected pathway - a heterosexual marriage and fatherhood. To go against these risked alienation from family, friends and their community and for participants who grew up during these decades, the reality of foregrounding a gay identity was seen as too problematic at this time. During this time, participants still felt attracted to other men. However, a heterosexual relationship offered legitimacy by avoiding practices that were regulated as deviant and providing the space to take up a subject position as a father. This was a complex process as fathers managed their private and public identities and had to ensure their practices were seen as legitimate, which was provided by heterosexual relationships. However as time progressed, they reached the point where they no longer felt able to manage their public and private sexual identities and had a right to identify publicly as gay. The following chapter discusses how fathers managed this within the heteronormative expectations of social institutions.

CHAPTER FIVE

5 Challenging heteronormative expectations: the right to identify as gay

5.1 Introduction

Taking up a subject position as a gay man was complex for participants as they had spent a number of years being married and a father and these positions carried accountability to their wife, children and other family members.

Identifying as gay, challenges heteronormative practices of being a husband and father. As a father there is an expectation to maintain the family unit, provide for and protect their children. These positions are constructed from powerful heteronormative expectation and identifying as gay positioned subjects outside of regulated practices as governed through social institutions and self-regulation. This was further complicated as publicly participants moved from identifying as straight to gay in very short time periods (e.g. participants often came out to their wives and children within a period of days). However, this was preceded by long periods, often years, of participants moving towards self-acceptance of a gay identity. The action of coming out presented challenges to each father in different ways. For those who were still married and living in the family home, the impact of coming out to others as a gay man risked the things they had desired when younger and most valued now - having a traditional family and being a father. For those who had separated from their wives, their identity as a father remained important and identifying openly as gay problematised the dominant social and cultural expectations of their position as a father and made them accountable for undermining the expected practices of being a father.

The action of claiming a public position as a gay man was managed differently by participants but involved a journey of self-acceptance of their sexual identity. This process was complex as it was impacted by varied rules and practices, many of which led to divisions between the reality that fathers were attempting to claim and the reality their families wanted to maintain. In chapter four the

analysis focused on participants accounts of their decision to position their identities within heteronormative constructions of family and how this governed what was seen as acceptable practices based on the power of social institutions and self-regulation. This chapter presents an analysis of how fathers managed their public transition to identifying as a gay man and the process of managing this for them and their children.

5.2 Coming out of marriage

For participants, whose ages ranged from being in their 40s to 60s, the coming out process was different to explanations provided by varied coming out models. They had been in marriages and occupied heteronormative positions for a number of years and had one or more children. Participants constructed the challenges that identifying as gay presented to their identities as a husband and father. This was impacted by the status of their relationship with their wife and how the practices of marriage were constructed. For participants who were married the journey to self-acceptance was prolonged, often over a number of years. For participants who were separated from their wife self-acceptance was less prolonged. Dale, in extract 1, explained how he managed self-acceptance of his gay identity:

Extract 1

1. Interviewer What, can I ask, after you and your wife told
2. him how long after...
3. Dale Yeah, how long after, ok, ok. Yes, I think the
4. first thing I would say about coming out was
5. that I had to come out to myself and accept it.
6. That happened somewhere around the April of
7. that particular year, when I finally just threw
8. away all the pretence that I wasn't [gay] and
9. threw away all the fears. Erm, once I'd done
10. that, there was the first change, the big major

11. change, because even if I hadn't had gay sex
12. and all the rest of it I would have been totally
13. better in myself, because I just accepted
14. myself at that point.

Dale accounted for his coming out as involving self-management over a period of time and he explained 'I had to come out to myself and accept it' (line 5). This is a significant shift as starting to accept a gay identity was not seen as a position available to him historically (as discussed in chapter 4) as those around him and social institutions were anti-homosexual, which created powerful expectations for heterosexual practices. This transition clearly took time as Dale needed to construct a new version of reality, a place where he was able to foreground a subject-position as gay and, 'just threw away all the pretence that I wasn't [gay] and threw away all the fears' (lines 7 and 8). He does not explain these 'fears' but a gay identity was genealogically situated as immoral and deviant. This self-acceptance fore-grounds his gay identity. Managing this was a difficult time for him, as positioning himself openly as a gay man would require a fundamental public reconstruction of his identity and this had the potential to have a very detrimental effect on his identities as a husband and father. However, he constructs this as, 'the first change, the big major change' (line 10). Dale positions this change as being more than a physical attraction to men, but a core part of his identity as, 'even if I hadn't had gay sex and all the rest of it I would have been totally better' (lines 11 to 13). His repositioned sexual identity is part of him and acknowledging this publicly is part of his self-acceptance and for the first time stops marginalising a position as a gay man, which was always present but the 'pretence' (line 8) up until this point had fore-grounded a subject position as a straight man.

The action of positioning himself as openly gay is that he is directly accountable to his wife and son for the impact this could have on them and their practices as

a family. Actions that can be classified as brave are usually applauded and Dale constructs his public coming out as the point he, 'threw away all the fears' (line 9). However, taking up a position as an openly gay man had potential to disrupt his identities as a husband and father, but not taking up this position put his long-term happiness at stake. Dale protects himself from criticism by explaining he had struggled with managing this moral position for a long period, but reached the point where he no longer felt able to fulfil the expectations of his husband and father identities as a straight man. He constructs his actions as something he had to do for himself, 'whether or not you go and act upon it' but makes clear it is not just about sexual attraction, it is about no longer being able to accept the division between the rules and practices of these two contradictory subject-positions. The challenge of self-acceptance of a gay identity is also evident in Nigel's account in extract 2:

Extract 2

1. Nigel I would have been in my early 40s. And I have to
2. tell you, because this kinda conflict in my
3. identities was seriously fucking me up I spent
4. about 7 years in therapy. And, I mean I'm still in
5. therapy actually, but that phase in therapy shall
6. we say [referring back to coming out period]. It
7. was really through a lot of that work that I
8. found a high level of self-acceptance.

Nigel constructs the 'conflict' in his identities and positions this as something that was, '...seriously fucking me up' (line 3). He constructs his account of coming out as something that was challenging and took place over a long period of time, rather than a rash or quick decision. Again, the decision to come out is constructed as something that became unavoidable. Nigel explains that the conflict between identities before coming out was causing him distress and led to him spending, 'about 7 years in therapy' (line 4). This constructs the action of

coming out as challenging and needing resolution and the only way to achieve self-acceptance was by resolving the conflict between his identities. Nigel identified as gay in the later years of school (see previous chapter, extract 23) and identified two contradictory subject-positions: as a gay man and father. Power from heteronormative expectations and social institutions led to him marrying and becoming a father. However, he did his best to meet to act according to the rules and practices of these positions but reached the point where he was no longer able to manage the conflict this was causing him. His identity as a gay man never went away but was regulated and governed as unacceptable as a married father. Nigel constructs his position as a father as important, however, he reached a point where he no longer felt able to manage this conflict. This creates a complex situation with contradictory position, as it suggests that Nigel only accepted a gay identity during his marriage. This position protects Nigel from criticism as his account details the crisis in his identities that is only resolved after several years of therapy to reach a position of self-acceptance of a gay identity. Ralph also took time to accept his gay identity and this was impacted by people close to him dying (similar to Nigel) and this made him more unhappy living according to heteronormative expectation. In extract 3, Thomas positions himself as facing similar challenges about his identity as a gay man and it taking a number of years to achieve self-acceptance:

Extract 3

1. Thomas I had been thinking about it [coming out] the
2. preceding few years, incredible time scales,
3. but I had been thinking about it more and
4. more about being bisexual. I thought this is
5. nonsense, how can you possibly be bisexual
6. and only consider having sex with one
7. women and how many men have I looked at.
8. It sounds pervy, but it is not bisexual, is it? It
9. is a question of honesty. I realised it is much

10. more about who you are as a person in the
11. world and much more about identity. And
12. then of course romantic love and so on and I
13. then, kinda realised and I suppose I am still
14. realising the breadth of it really. So...
15. Interviewer While this was going on? Because it sounds
16. as though this went on over a number of
17. years...
18. Thomas Yes it definitely was

In his account of managing his identities, Thomas, initially took up a position where he identified as bisexual. However, he displayed resistance to this by explaining, 'this is nonsense' (lines 4 to 5). This constructs coming out as an act that Thomas managed for, 'the preceding few years' (lines 1-2). Initially this involved positioning his sexual identity as bisexual, although this was problematic for him in the mismatch between his sexual identity and practices. Thomas questioned, 'how can you possibly be bisexual and only consider having sex with one women?' (lines 5 and 7) and this dilemma was constructed because of the number of men he had, 'looked at' (line 7). He accounts for the continuing challenges of managing his identities as, 'a question of honesty' (line 9). Extract 3 provides an account of a protracted repositioning of his identity, first to accept his own homosexual identity and then to publicly claim this subject-position. Thomas manages the moral challenges of the problems this would foreground by questioning how it was possible for him to continue as things were. His account clearly articulates the self-management he negotiated over a number of years. The impact of heteronormative expectations is still evident but he had to manage the challenge this presented alongside being able to be himself and the desire and right to be, 'who you are as a person in the world' (lines 10 and 11). However, in extract 4 Thomas explains the potential problems that could be

foreground if he took up a subject-position as a gay man and violated heteronormative expectations of family life:

Extract 4

1. Interviewer Because of others or because of how you set
2. yourself?
3. Thomas I suppose it was because the terrible, terrible
4. thing I would be doing to the children, to tell
5. them I was gay. It would have a terrible effect
6. on their lives but equally I couldn't bear the
7. thought of going back in the closet - it was like
8. a genie out of the bottle and once it was
9. opened it wasn't going to go back in and once,
10. thinks like having, like realising that you have
11. been deceiving yourself you can't go back into
12. deceiving yourself. You could lie, you can't
13. deceive yourself in the same way. A lie is a
14. deliberate falsehood rather than a self-
15. deception I think. It's a grey area.

Thomas identifies two potential positions but problematised both. Either deceiving himself and go 'back into the closet' (line 7) or do this, 'terrible, terrible thing...' (line 3) to his children by taking up a position as a gay man and risk this having the potential to cause, 'a terrible effect on their lives' (line 5). For Thomas, where claiming a public gay sexual identity is seen as self-actualising, no longer deceiving himself; but by this action risks doing something that had the potential to have a 'terrible effect' on the lives of his children. Thomas presents a dilemma: be true to himself and take up a position as an openly gay man, but be accountable for causing problems for his children and being seen as a bad father, or; go back 'in the closet' and continue to deceive himself and others but maintain the dominant cultural and historical expectations of his practices as a

father. The challenge of this is expressed throughout his account, which in many respects positions him in a no-win situation. His actions present a challenge to him and he debates whether he, 'could lie' (line 12) or, 'go back into deceiving' himself (lines 11 and 12) but he constructs his actions, for self-acceptance of his passion as a gay man, as reaching a point of no-return as the, 'genie out of the bottle and once it was opened it wasn't going to go back in' (lines 7 and 8).

Thomas engages in a complex explanation where he is aware of the potential impact of his actions but has tried to maintain his position as a straight man and father but can no longer go on deceiving himself. The space he occupied as a father has and remains governed by heteronormative expectations that he has self-regulated for many years but can no longer go on deceiving himself or others. While extracts 1-4 clearly explain the complex negotiations and self-management that these participants engaged in, taking up a position as gay man was multifaceted and required ongoing management over time. Kyle explains what he sees as the second stage of his self-acceptance:

Extract 5

1. Kyle I wasn't strong enough in my convictions and I
2. wasn't sure how things would develop to be
3. able, to be able to say I am gay. I would have
4. probably said that I am bi or I am curious and
5. left it at that. But gradually it became more and
6. more... The second stage, I guess, which was
7. perhaps six months to a year after this
8. revelation, I found different sites and I had just
9. found Gaydar I think and there was another,
10. which I can't, out personals I think it was called,
11. and I had got a profile on there. I'd put in the
12. profile on one section, must be discreet as my

13. family are unaware that I, my family don't know
14. I am on the site basically.

Kyle's explains part of his coming out journey where he started to consider how he would could take up a subject-position as a gay man but felt he, 'wasn't strong enough in [his] convictions' (line 1) to resist heteronormative family expectations. Kyle intention was to manage his gay identity by keeping it shielded from others and he justifies this by partitioning his sexual identity and states he would probably have said, 'I am bi or I am curious and left it at that' (lines 4 and 5). It is evident from the account that he is managing a moral position that potentially offered a space to have contact with other men and maintain his position as a married man and straight father, avoiding creating a problematic position by foregrounding his gay identity. Kyle suggests that his identity exploration paused temporarily but this at that point, but constructs a position where a reality was constructed where gradually his actions gathered too much momentum to stop and this led to the 'second stage' (line 6). The phrase, 'more and more' (line 5 and 6) constructs his sexual identity as having a space to evolving with increasing momentum. From his account he 'found different sites' (line 8) referring to gay chat and dating website as this suggests they were just found, when he would have been navigating and directing the online search. This protects him from being held accountable as a married man and father for actively searching for gay chat and dating sites, a position not seen as compatible with the heteronormative expectations of these identities.

Using gay dating sites created a conflict between Kyle's repositioned gay sexual identity and his identities as a husband and father. To manage this, Kyle made the decision to continue using the site and regulated this by explaining to those accessing his profile that he, 'must be discreet, as my family are unaware... I am on the site' (lines 12 to 14). This constructs coming out as a complex set of actions that requires active self-management, to avoid the conflict between the heteronormative expectations of his husband and father identities, and his

emerging identity as a gay man. In extracts 3 and 5, Thomas and Kyle constructed a potential sexual identity as bisexual to manage this transition, although neither actually identified as bisexual. However, this construction allowed them to create a space to manage their sexual identity and begin the process of explaining to others the marginalised subject positioning they were occupying and the reality of this for them and their family. The act of coming out required self-acceptance of a gay identity and then negotiating the re-positioning of their sexual identity and managing the problems this foregrounded. For Kyle, the final act of confirmation and self-acceptance of his gay identity was his relationship with another man, as detailed in extract 6:

Extract 6

1. Kyle I suppose, the sexual side in me was now awake
2. but I had nowhere to go with it. I didn't feel
3. attracted to Pam physically anymore and the
4. gay side was now surfacing. This was before I
5. had met this American (man) and once I had
6. met the American this was it, there was no
7. going back as far as I was concerned. It still took
8. a little while I think for me to realise this was
9. truly me. It was still initially, too much hassle
10. initially, too much hurt going on if I admitted it
11. to the family at that time. So I guess that I did all
12. I could to carry on talking with people on the
13. net, meeting an occasional person. And
14. eventually that, again, it became a little
15. frustrating, that you were lifted to the purely
16. carnal side of it. And as I said to you I am a bit of

17. a romantic anyway so I didn't particularly want
18. that to be the way that things were going to be
19. forever.

The exploration of a gay identity using internet sites led Kyle to have contact with and meet another man. In his account, Kyle minimises the accountability of meeting and having a relationship with another man with reference to his relationship with his wife by stating, 'I didn't feel attracted to Pam physically anymore' (lines 2 and 3). For Kyle, the meeting with another man opened a version of reality that validated the subject-position as a gay man he wanted to occupy but had felt that had not been available. Prior to this he had been aware of his attraction to men but for the first time he foregrounds his gay identity by claiming, 'the gay side was now surfacing' (line 4) and this was before he had had a physical encounter with another man. Encounters with other men offered a new way to view reality for Kyle and he constructs this as a defining moment and explains, 'there was no going back as far as I was concerned' (lines 6 and 7). However, this created a conflict, Kyle had started to engage in the social practices of being a gay man, but was still living in the family home and the heteronormative expectations of these positions problematised his subject-position as a gay man. There is a dilemma for Kyle: he had experienced self-fulfilment by meeting and having a relationship with a man, but to pursue this he would have to hurt his family. He was also frustrated by this as he accounts for how this type of meeting meant, 'you were lifted to the purely carnal side of it' (lines 15 and 16). For Kyle, who constructs himself, 'a bit of a romantic' (lines 16 and 17) this was not what he wanted. He did not want a relationship with another man based purely on a sexual relationship. His attraction to men was more than that: it was about wanting a committed relationship; romance and love.

Kyle constructs a staged journey to coming out. Initially he made contact with gay men on the internet; met up with a man away from his own locality and

then; started meeting men in his own locality. He manages the position he takes up to explore his emerging gay identity, however, the challenges caused by this and accountability for disrupting his marriage and family is evident as he is challenging the constructions that govern his position as a husband and father. Although he puts forward arguments to justify the repositioning of his identity in a considered and gradual way, 'by talking with people [gay men] on the net and meeting an occasional person [man]' (lines 12 and 13), he remained accountable to his family and clearly struggled with his varied positions as a gay man, husband and father. His initial meetings with gay men allowed him to continue to meet the heteronormative expectations of being a married man and father, but he did not want that to be, 'the way that things were going to be forever' (lines 18 and 19) and if he was to avoid that he had challenge the heteronormatively regulated positions of husband and father and be accountable for taking up a position that was outside the regulated space for these positions. Having a physical relationship with another man was also a defining moment for Harry, as detailed in extract 7:

Extract 7

1. Interviewer When you said about your first indiscretion is it
2. something that just sort of happened?
3. Harry Erm, it did just happen but I think I probably
4. put myself in a situation where it could happen
5. I think. But yes it did just happen, I didn't really
6. go out with the complete intention of doing
7. anything but I did put myself at risk of doing
8. something.
9. Interviewer Right, and did that then lead to other things?
10. Harry Eventually, eventually it did. What happened
11. is, bloody awful, stress...What stress does to
12. you. I mean, I went into cinema in Manchester

13. and erm, someone was just kneeling in front of
14. me and I thought what the hell. I went back to
15. my apartment and threw up. It really shook me
16. up. It stopped me performing for four years.

Harry accounts for his first sexual contact with another man, in a cinema and constructs this as putting himself in a space where this action could occur. He had visited a gay cinema and presents a complex account of his actions. Harry had referred earlier in his interview to his 'first indiscretion' and these words were formed part of the interview question with a request for an account of his actions at that time. Harry constructs this meeting by backgrounding accountability for his actions and constructs his practice as passive as he was somewhere where an encounter, 'could happen' (line 4) and it, 'did just happen' (line 5) but the way he manages avoids him being seen as acting immorally. Harry went to a gay cinema, but constructs a reality where he is almost surprised something did happen and explains, 'I didn't really go out with the complete intention of doing anything' (lines 5 to 7). This constructed a moral position that caused Harry distress as he went, 'back to my apartment and threw up' (lines 15 and 16) and the stress of this is positioned as stopping him, 'performing for four years' (line 17). At the time Harry worked in the performance industry and the impact of this action, which went against the expectations that governed positions as husband and father lasted for a number of years. This led Harry to avoid any practices and self-acceptance of taking up a position as a gay man. This constructs how positions are governed by power from social institutions and self-regulation and engaging in practices that are not seen as compatible with this can led to discipline from both self and others. Similar to Harry, in extract 8, Nigel describes a long and complex journey towards in positioning himself as gay:

Extract 8

1. Nigel But you see it was an experiment in world
2. travelling, I don't mean British Airways tickets,
3. like going from one world to another. Because I
4. think part of my coming out process was a
5. series of experiments. One of which was what
6. would it be like to go to a gay pride event. And
7. then, and then I would go back into being
8. married.

Nigel accounts for his coming out as an experimental journey and positioned his identity as going, 'from one world to another' (line 3). The reference of going between worlds constructs him managing different identity positions. As part of his coming out journey he would foreground practices associated with being a gay man (e.g. going to a pride event) but would then have to revert to foregrounding his position as a husband and, 'go back to being married' (line 7 and 8). Nigel does not construct his actions as either positive or negative. He accounts for his actions as, 'part of my coming out process' (line 4) constructing this as a process that was about self-acceptance of a gay subject-position. His positions as a husband and father and the heteronormative accountability that went with these, along with the expected practice to support and care for his wife and children, coming out publicly as a gay man at that point was not a subject-position that was seen as available. Nigel managed this through, 'a series of experiments' (line 4) where he was able to alternate between foregrounding a straight and gay identity, according the subject-position he was occupying at the time and the practices and rules that governed each position.

Accounts 1-8 explain how self-acceptance of a position as a gay man places participants at odds with the dominant discourses of marriage and parenting (e.g. protector, guardian and role-model) and those often associated with being a gay man (e.g. self-indulgent, careless, and irresponsible) (Felmlee, Orzechowicz

and Fortes, 2010). This constructed a dilemma for participants: continue living as a straight man and conceal their gay identity or; take up a subject-position as gay and problematise their position as husband and father and be accountable for practices that are at odds with the socially imposed rules of these identities. However, for participants who were not in a marriage this was different. For Tony, the reality of self-acceptance was still strived for but this was more about self-management, as him and his wife were separated:

Extract 9

1. Interviewer You say you were leading separate lives, was it
2. at that point that you started to see other
3. people?
4. Tony Yeah, the turning point for me. That was when I
5. decided I wasn't going to pretend to anybody.
6. That was my big coming out. Lots of people had
7. known individually before that, it was the time
8. that I said no, enough is enough, having people
9. pretending that I am something I am not. Erm,
10. so that was when I started making lots of gay
11. friends, things like that. Up until that point, to
12. be honest with you, I didn't really have many
13. friends.

For Tony taking up a subject-position as a gay man was about his self-management. He explains, 'lots of people had known individually before that' (lines 6 and 7) but a number of people were not aware. Since his separation from his wife a space was available to share his gay identity with people but this required managing as identifying as gay problematised the heteronormative rules and practices of being a father. Tony's actions show resistance to this power by explaining, 'enough is enough' (line 8). This demonstrates less accountability to heteronormative expectations and by doing so is able to

foreground a subject position as a gay father. He also constructs a reality where a gay subject-position is seen as more than a sexual identity as prior to this he explains, 'I didn't really have many friends' (lines 12 and 13). Tony constructs the formation of friendships as being difficult in the subject-position of a straight man, which suggests the rules governing friendships were informed by social institutions and self-regulation, which prevented him making friends with gay men. When the expectations that governed this position were removed he 'started making lots of gay friends' (lines 10 and 11). For Ben who had split from his wife some time earlier and had custody of his children self-acceptance is constructed as taking place in a shorter time period:

Extract 10

1. Interviewer And so it was just six years ago that you came out.
2. This is going back a bit now but when would you
3. have first thought to yourself I am gay?
4. Ben It was about the same time. It was just this one
5. guy that I had met and there was just something
6. that seemed to click. It was just something, sort
7. of, made me realise that I liked him and I fancied
8. him, I dunno, it just seemed to come out over a six
9. month period. Neither of us had sort of
10. mentioned it before we went out for the night and
11. as I say just a bit of drunkenness and that was it.
12. The number of people who have said to me "you
13. must have had feelings before" and I didn't.

Ben had been married and had not considered a gay identity until he met a man and over a short number of months realised that, 'I liked him and fancied him' (line 7 and 8). Ben constructs this as an action where, 'there was just something that seemed to click' (lines 5 and 6). The rules and practices that governed heterosexually married men in accounts 1-8 are not evident in the same way for

Ben. Earlier in the interview, Ben reported that he identified as a gay man and engages in self-management by constructing his first sexual encounter as being, 'just a bit of drunkenness' but foregrounding his gay identity presented challenges to his position as married man and father. A number of people had argued that he must have felt attracted to men previously (lines 12 and 13) but he claims he did not. Ben resists a version of reality that he must have had, 'feelings before' (line 13) for men, which is based around powerful notions of fixed identity positions, which constructs how practices linked with subject-positions are governed. Ben has a right to accept his subject-position as a gay man and his account constructs this as being unproblematic, although he manages his position as a gay man and father by keeping them separate (extract 23, chapter six). Similar to Ben, in extract 11, Elliott, constructs self-acceptance as being linked to Jack's response:

Extract 11

1. Elliott Before we knew it, we were needing to speak to
2. each other every day and we just realised, like it
3. was the same day we both realised that we had
4. both fallen for each other.
5. Interviewer Right
6. Elliott Jack phoned me and told me I've got something
7. to tell you and you will probably not want to
8. speak to me again and he said I think I love you
9. and I said I think I love you and that's how it
10. started. I moved back to my mum and dad's
11. permanently then and told Pam about it and she
12. wanted to meet Jack.

At the time Elliott met Jack he was separated from his wife, although they were still in contact with each other. Elliott and Jack had initially met via the internet and, 'were needing to speak to each other every day' (line 1 and 2). Elliott

constructs their attraction to each other as becoming evident and explains how it was seen as potentially problematic, positioning heterosexual as the norm and problematising homosexual relationships (lines 7 and 8). Elliott's account focuses on love and makes no reference to problematising a gay relationship at the time he accepted a subject-position as a gay man, although heteronormative expectations in his position as a father are evident elsewhere in his account (e.g. see chapter 4, extract 12). For Tony, Ben and Elliott, who were separated from their wives when they took up a position as a gay man, self-acceptance was explained as being less problematic. Not being in a married relationship during this journey to self-acceptance problematised a subject-position as a gay man far less as they were not as regulated by social institutions and self-management that was evident in accounts 1-8, where foregrounding a gay identity contradicted the rules and practices expected of being a married man. The decision to come-out by all participants is seen as something they had to do - a right to be true to themselves situated in a liberal humanist discourse. However, participants had been situated, often for many years, in husband and father subject-positions and governed by the rules and practices of these heterosexual constructions. However, these created a dilemma, background a gay subject-position and foreground a straight identity and the heteronormative assumptions that accompany this or foreground a gay man and be held accountable for violating heteronormative expectations of family. Participants became fathers in a particular version of family and drawing on them drew on a liberal humanist discourse of being able to explore their full potential and express oneself freely. This process of being true to one's self took place, often over a number of years, as they had reached a defining moment where they no longer felt able to manage the conflict between subject-positions as a gay and straight man. However, fathers foregrounding a gay subject-position had implications for their family.

5.3 Renegotiating family

Once fathers reached a position of self-identifying as gay, one of the next actions was coming out to their wife, if they were still married, and children. A number of participants explained the emotional and social aspects of their relationships and their position as a father positively. However, this also impacted on how fathers prepared themselves for coming out to their wife and children as they saw it as potentially damaging to family relationships. They had delayed their coming out because of their identities as a husband and father, but this family construction now created a dilemma. They had reached a defining moment where they felt unable to continue to live as a straight man and had a right to be true to their self, but foregrounding a gay identity would disrupt subject-positions associated with family. This is set out by Nigel in extract 10.

Extract 12

1. Nigel It was 1997, that I actually came out to her.
2. And that was a very traumatic weekend. We
3. did try to hold it together for two years after
4. that I don't know it just felt a ridiculous thing
5. to try and prop up. You know and I think,
6. what I was saying to you earlier about my
7. feelings of being dishonest and inauthentic, it
8. had just got really reinforced.

Nigel explains the dilemma of managing coming out to his wife. The purpose of this was to foreground his gay identity, but this presented a challenge as a gay subject-position is problematic in a heterosexual marriage. He wanted to identify publicly as gay, but displays self-management by trying 'to hold [the marriage] together for two years after that' (lines 3 and 4). However, looking back he argues the attempt to hold his marriage was 'a ridiculous thing to try and prop up' (lines 4 and 5) as it prolonged the tension created by heteronormative expectations of family and his right to identify as gay. This presents coming out

as a complex set of actions and Nigel realises this but is also accountable for the problems his actions have had and attempts to maintain a commitment to his marriage for a further two years. Nigel positions his actions at this time as being linked to his 'feelings of being dishonest and inauthentic' (line 7) from foregrounding his gay identity. This presents a complex position where the purpose of coming out was to enable Nigel to create a space to be gay, but this had to be managed alongside his identity as a husband and the heteronormative assumptions that accompany this. This constructs the coming out process as challenging with participants wanting to foreground a gay identity, family wanting to foreground a straight identity and this being in continual tension and disclosure to his wife, also became a coming out process for her. Ralph, in extract 13, also explains the complexity of renegotiating family over time:

Extract 13

1. Interviewer Right. Can I ask when you left the family home?
2. Ralph January 2002. I came out in August 2000 and I
3. stayed there for a year and half but it was
4. stressful. We felt we were treading water,
5. neither could make any moves, we couldn't
6. move on. But once I had done the coming out
7. bit it was much easier. It was a bit like a phoney
8. war though really. We expected something to
9. happen but nothing did happen. And we
10. stopped sharing the same bedroom pretty
11. quickly I think. And it was kinda like weird
12. really. To everybody outside we were the same
13. but inside we were quite different and it felt
14. too much like we were playing a role.

Ralph confirms that after coming out to his wife he remained in the family home for 18 months. Ralph claims, 'once I had done the coming out bit it was much easier' (lines 6 and 7) but the action of remaining in the family home stilted the foregrounding of a gay subject position. Ralph's coming out act was significant for him and his wife as it created tension in their married relationship and his account suggests that this could not be resolved while he was there. A clear outcome of this act was that they, 'stopped sharing the same bedroom pretty quickly' (lines 10 and 11) and, 'we felt we were treading water, neither could make any moves, we couldn't move on' (lines 4 to 6). Ralph demonstrates agency in his action of coming out, but this created an expectation for him that something would happen. At this point, the implication of him coming out was that it would lead to a fundamental reconstruction of their family. However, he contrasts this with how, 'to everybody outside we were the same' (line 12). This created a dilemma as Ralph had justified his coming out but then nothing seemed to change within the family home and this, 'felt too much like we were playing a role' (lines 13 and 14). There is no direct reference to resistance to his foregrounded gay identity from his wife, but the heteronormative expectations of being a husband, father and family life clearly continued after his coming out. Even though Ralph had come out, this positioned the family as remaining accountable for maintaining the construction of family life expected by dominant heteronormative ideas of how families should be to those outside the family home and this is affirmed as it appeared nothing had changed although, 'inside [the family] were quite different' (line 13).

The account clearly shows the tensions of managing the coming out process. Once Ralph had made the disclosure to his wife they, 'expected something to happen but nothing did happen' (lines 8 and 9). His disclosure had created a tension between his subject position as gay man and husband that had to be managed, but to those outside everything seemed the same - father and mother living in the family home with their children. The act of coming out caused

significant disruption within the family but a discourse of heteronormativity is in tension with a liberal humanist discourse. The reason for disclosing his gay identity was because he no longer felt able to live an assumed straight identity and while the disclosure had gone some way to enable him to reposition his sexual identity, the expectations of positions as a husband while still in the family home remained dominant. Ralph accounts for the tension created by this with his claim, 'we were playing a role' (line 13). His 'role' as a father and husband had been disrupted with the disclosure and there was tension between him wanting to foreground his gay identity within a heteronormative family context that problematises this as it is based on foregrounding a straight identity and heteronormativity. In extract 14, Thomas explains similar problems:

Extract 14

1. Thomas So I came out, er, fully as gay, well coming out 4
2. years ago to my wife and then to the children in
3. 2004, which, in other words 3½ ago because I
4. felt I had to move out part time at least and, if
5. you like, live partly as a gay man so to speak. A
6. very difficult time for everybody and came out
7. to quite a few people and talked about it with
8. my wife, we have been able to talk about things
9. er and er, that's been ok. I mean her reaction,
10. would devastated be the word? Certainly upset.
11. I told her a number of years before that, well
12. seven years before that, I was bisexual. And I
13. had said that before we married I had one or
14. two experiences with men but it was nothing
15. major. So it wasn't a complete, complete shock
16. I suppose.

As with Nigel and Ralph, Thomas also came out to his wife prior to telling his children. He acknowledges that it was a difficult time for him and his family. He initially works up a view of his wife's reaction - 'would devastated be the word?' (line 10) to him coming out but problematised this less by stating she was 'certainly upset' (line 10). Thomas sets out a moral argument for being solely accountable for the impact of his coming out on his wife as he, 'told her a number of years before that... I was bisexual' (lines 11 and 12) and before they married explained he had had 'one or two experiences with men' (line 13). This construction helps to justify his action of coming out by disclaiming accountability on his part: his account of his actions prior to marriage could be seen as being brave and truthful - actions that are usually applauded - as even though his wife knew about his relationships with men she still decided to marry him. This account and his reference to identifying as bisexual (in extract 4) clearly show how coming out problematised the subject-position of husband as he no longer had a location within the rights and duties of this position when he foregrounded his gay identity.

This constructs Thomas' identity positions as being carefully managed with him taking up positions to almost minimise the impact on being a husband and father over a number of years. On the one hand he did not want to disrupt his family, but his self-acceptance and gradual foregrounding of his gay identity over a number of years made this impossible. To reconcile this tension he 'had to move out part time at least and, if you like, live partly as a gay man so to speak' (lines 3 and 4) and this requires managing his identities during this time. When he is in the family home, a heteronormative discourse positions him as straight and this is acceptable. When living away from the family home, in his own apartment, it is acceptable to foreground his gay identity. Again this constructs coming out as a process that requires self-management to avoid problematising different social contexts.

Accounts from participants about coming out to their wives focus on: the time leading up to disclosure and how this took a number of years; coming out as a process rather than a one-time event; has far reaching impacts for the family that take time to emerge; and requires renegotiation of the family unit that impacts on all members of the family. This challenges how coming out is often seen as a one-off event or short process. For previously married fathers it is more complex than an event and more about a process of managing the foregrounding and backgrounding of identities according to discourse of heteronormativity and liberal humanism for all family members .

Fathers identified coming out to their children as one of their most difficult actions in renegotiating family. They had to negotiate how to tell their child/children, how to account for the action of foregrounding their gay subject-position and manage any actual tension this created as a father. This was difficult, as they did not know how problematic coming out would be between them and their children and how this would be impacted by their age and gender. Due to heteronormative expectations, the positions of being a father and gay man, particularly for men who raised their children within a heterosexual family, were seen as polarised and potentially in conflict with each other. Heteronormative regulation of positions suggests gay men are not identified as fathers and fathers are not identified as gay men. Another challenge in coming out to children was that it happened (for all except one) after participants had come out to their wife. This act often led to changes in the relationship between husbands and wives, which were often noticed by children, and fathers felt accountable for this. Extract 15, provides an account of how Dale's son had noticed these changes:

Extract 15

1. Dale It was obvious to him that there was a change
2. and though his questions were not necessarily

3. verbalised, they were there, you could hear
4. the question mark in whatever it was he said.
5. And I could see that it was causing a certain
6. amount of confusion because there was an
7. obvious change in lifestyle, in life patterns I
8. think it was. But when I told him with Gina he
9. wasn't fazed by it.
10. Interviewer With conversations you have had since, or just
11. your view of looking back, do you think he
12. knew before you told him?
13. Dale He wasn't that surprised. I don't think he had
14. formulated in his mind because such issues,
15. the mere issue of gayness had never been
16. discussed. But he was not surprised, he wasn't
17. gobsmacked about it – fuck me I'd never have
18. guessed, you know, and neither were any of
19. his friends.

Referring to his son, Dale explains, 'though his questions were not necessarily verbalised, they were there' (lines 2 and 3). The change in his behaviour had been noticed by Dale and from his son's actions deduced that he had some awareness that things within the family had changed. Dale accounts for this as 'there was an obvious change in [my] lifestyle, in life patterns' (lines 6 and 7). For example he was going out more often and doing things separately from his wife. The decision was made by Dale and his wife to tell their son, their only child, about his gay identity and they did this together. Dale constructs telling his son something that was not problematic for his son by explaining 'he wasn't fazed by it' (lines 8 and 9). As Dale had noticed a change in his son's behaviour, he was asked by the interviewer whether he thought that this may have been because he suspected that his father was gay. Dale works up a position that makes this

unlikely and justifies this by stating 'the mere issue of gayness had never been discussed' (lines 15 and 16). This response suggests that the idea of anyone in the family being gay was not considered. This constructs the dilemma created by Dale foregrounding his gay identity as it is seen as something that is polarised from his subject-position as a father and their family conversations prior to him coming out. In the account Dale reduces the significance of this by stating, 'he wasn't gobsmacked about it' (lines 16 and 17), which suggests the disclosure was not seen as problematic to his son or, 'any of his friends' (lines 18 and 19). This constructs his son (and his son's friends) as taking a mature and accepting stance (his son was 16), avoiding Dale being seen as taking a morally unacceptable stance by his son. Thomas articulates in extract 16 how he made sense of the decision of when and how to tell his children:

Extract 16

1. Thomas But telling the children was fairly monumental
2. really and I was trying to get the timing right,
3. rightly or wrongly... But I didn't want to tell the
4. kids before Christmas and then actually my
5. daughter was in a pantomime so I didn't want
6. to tell her before the end of that. So I was
7. actually sitting on this knowledge for a month
8. or so. So I told them I was gay, I told them I was
9. going to move out part time, so that was very
10. difficult. My son actually caught me crying once
11. in the kitchen just before Christmas. When I
12. told him he said he wondered if I was having an
13. affair so he had some idea that something was
14. a foot. The children were then 14, 11 and 8.
15. Erm, so er, yeah, decided to tell them together
16. and tell them that I was gay really and didn't
17. say much more really in terms of that, er, I'd be

18. moving to a flat part of the time but still around
19. otherwise.

Thomas includes the ages of his children in his account, suggesting that this was a consideration in the decision to come-out to them. He also carefully considered when to disclose this 'monumental' information to his children as he wanted, 'to get the timing right' (line 2). He sees the potential difficulty of coming out to his children as whether it was the right or wrong thing to do, as the practice of being a gay man is seen as different from the practice of being a father and heteronormative expectations of family create potential tension between these. Thomas displays self-management to try and ensure he made the right choice for the sake of the children. Similar to Dale's son in extract 15, Thomas also refers to his son (who at 14 was only two years younger than Dale's son) having some idea that something was wrong and this was affirmed how his son had, 'caught me crying once in the kitchen just before Christmas (lines 10 and 11). For his children as well as disclosing his gay identity he would also be moving out and this creates a reality of a very different life for all members of the family. To manage this he explained to his children 'I'd be moving to a flat part of the time but still around otherwise' (lines 17 to 19). Thomas attempts to minimise the change by being there part-time but the account show the tension created by coming out as it created a new version of reality of family life from this point onwards.

The decision to come-out to his children had the potential to significantly disrupt their practice as a family, although Thomas minimises moral responsibility for this by arguing he would still be spending time in the home around and taking an active role in family life after he had moved out. He demonstrates self-management in the decision to come out to his children, but constructs the renegotiation of family as a more minor change as he sees his subject-position as a father as unchanged. This demonstrates the challenge of coming out for fathers. To foreground his gay identity living away from the family home is seen as the only reality and to foreground his father identity he needs to be in the

family home, which constructs the tension between these and different spaces are needed to achieve this. The space to be dad is governed by heteronormative expectations and this regulation problematised a subject-position as a gay man, so for Thomas his identities needed to be foregrounded in different locations. Extract 17 provides an account of how Nigel informed his son of his gay identity.

Extract 17

1. Nigel And I remember three months after our
2. separation sitting my son down in here and I
3. got myself worked up into a state to explain all
4. to him and erm, and done quite a bit of
5. research into it. Asking friends who were in the
6. same position how they had done it. So
7. actually, it was a very kind of planned
8. intervention. And erm, and it was the biggest
9. anti-climax ever because I came out to Marcus,
10. my son, and he said oh right and he said you
11. are still my dad, you still love me and I still love
12. you and what are we having for tea in the
13. same breath. And I thought, well, is that it
14. then? With my daughter, and she was three
15. months after that, it felt a bit more difficult
16. and she was upset. But her main source of
17. upset was that she had been, not told at the
18. same time as her brother because she felt like
19. she had had information withheld from her. So
20. erm, and I think as well that those reactions I
21. have described to you continue to the present

22. day.
23. Interviewer From your daughter?
24. Nigel Yeah.

Nigel explains how he took time to research how to come out to his son (lines 4 and 5) and asked 'friends who were in the same position how they had done it' (lines 5 and 6), so that he could manage it appropriately. Unlike Dale and Thomas, Nigel told his son without his wife present. This took place three months after him and his wife had separated. His son's response was less problematic than he expected and he accounts for it as 'the biggest anti-climax ever' (line 6). Nigel, unlike Thomas, made the decision to tell his children separately he told his daughter about his gay identity three months later. He explains the response from his daughter was, 'a bit more difficult and she was upset' (lines 15 and 16). Nigel accounts for her upset as being mainly attributable to being told three months after her brother. However, he states, 'well those reactions I have described to you [her upset] continue to the present day' (lines 20 to 22). In response to being asked for clarification, Nigel confirmed his daughter's upset as being linked to being told after her brother, but it still continues two years later. He explains being told later was the, 'main source of upset', which suggests that part of the problem was being told her dad was gay. There is no further discussion of how his daughter made sense of his foregrounded gay subject-position. Nigel resists accountability for his decision to tell her three months after her brother and explains her response being due to the fact, 'she felt like she had had information withheld from her' (lines 18 and 19) rather than his foregrounded identity per-se. There is no further explanation of the reasons for this or the impact that may still be evident in their relationship as a result of this.

In extract 18 Kyle explains how coming out to his son had not happened in a planned way. To explore gay lifestyle and culture he joined a number of gay sites

(e.g. GAYDAR). At this point he had not come-out to his wife or adult children.

Kyle accounts for how his son found about his foregrounded gay identity:

Extract 18

1. Kyle I went on to the site one day, my son was away
2. from home at this time, he'd got his own place,
3. and he came back to use our computer as he
4. didn't have one at his place. I came back and
5. one night I went into this out gay personal site
6. and there was a message for me it was from my
7. son saying, "yes dad, you do need to be
8. discreet, but you haven't been discreet enough
9. have you?".

His son initially made his father aware that he had discovered his profile on a gay website by leaving him a message on his profile telling his father, 'yes dad, you do need to be discreet' (lines 7 and 8). This discovery by his son made Kyle accountable for disrupting his positions as a husband and father and this made him accountable for disrupting the practices expected of these. Kyle was engaged in self-management of foregrounding a gay subject-position assisted by his contact with other gay men, via gay dating sites. However, this also made him accountable to his son and subsequently other family members for problematising his family. This emphasises the tension of taking up a subject-position that problematised being a husband and father as the rights and duties that constructed these now make him accountable for foregrounding a position that is seen as morally acceptable by heteronormative family expectations. In extract 19, Kyle accounts for this:

Extract 19

1. Kyle So I rang him up and we had a meeting, er, it
2. was, I was actually quite elated because I was

3. maybe searching to be found out. I don't know,
4. maybe I had been lax on purpose. I didn't want
5. him to find out on purpose, I hadn't planned it,
6. it was out of the blue this. Erm, but I had, I had
7. quite a nice feeling about it apart from the fact
8. that he was, not condemning me in any way, as
9. an initial reaction, but once we had our
10. meeting, I basically told him, not the whole
11. story but a reasonable amount of the story

Kyle accounts for the initial contact and subsequent discussion with his son in an impersonal and transactional way, 'I rang him up and we had a meeting' (line 1). In Kyle's account there are contradictory arguments. He initially minimises the discovery by stating, 'I was maybe searching [the sites] to be found out' (lines 2 and 3). However, he then retracts from this by stating 'I didn't want him to find out on purpose' (lines 4 and 5). He further modifies this by stating he had not planned for it to happen this way, but now that this is what had happened 'had quite a nice feeling about it' (lines 6 and 7). Kyle is relieved that the implications of his son discovering his father's gay identity on their relationship, was not overly negative and it had not led to his son 'condemning me in any way' (line 8). However, there is no suggestion that this was done with the primary aim of deceiving his wife and children. This situation occurred because the space to explore and take up a subject-position as a gay man who is married and a father is seen as non-existent because of the heteronormative expectations around masculine identity, marriage and fatherhood. The discovery by Kyle's son created a space for Kyle to construct an account of his sexual identity as a gay man and makes clear he wanted to be out with his son and told him 'a reasonable amount of the story' (line 11) but not the whole story. Kyle's coming out was made necessary by his son's discovery, which he expresses relief about, however he censored what he told his son to minimise the potential for a negative response

and deal with his coming out in as positive a way as possible for their relationship. This account acknowledges the complexity of the coming out process and how taking up a subject-position outside of accepted practices (e.g. gay man as father) exposes participants to discipline from a heteronormative discourse. The accounts confirm that the initial act of coming out was simply the first step of an on-going process for all members of the family, rather than a short-lived event as often portrayed by coming out models. Participants had often spent many years forging a space to foreground a gay identity. However, this required on-going negotiation, as self-acceptance by participants of their gay identity was not always compatible the level of accountability other family members felt able to claim for violating dominant family expectations. Nigel, in extract 20 clearly articulates the constraints of this position:

Extract 20

1. Nigel I spent too much of my life not stating it, hiding
2. behind it, so from that point of view I would want
3. to say, not in a big announcement but not hiding
4. behind it. It is so bloody difficult though because
5. the default option is that you are straight.

Nigel claims as a husband and father ‘the default option is that you are straight’ (lines 4 and 5), which is unsurprising as this the construction that he has accountable to for many years. Nigel had to foreground a straight identity for a number of years, even though he had first considered a gay identity when still at school but for historical and cultural reasons felt this identity was not available to him. Nigel constructs an argument for no longer ‘hiding behind’ (lines 1 and 2) the expected identity that came with entering marriage and being a father as he had, ‘spent too much of [his] life not stating it’ (line 1). This creates a dilemma as he wants to foreground a gay subject-position and be open with others about his identity, but heteronormative expectations from being a husband and father create on-going accountability for him. Nigel delayed his coming out for many years, to meet these expectations of being a husband and father. He feels he has

achieved self-acceptance of his identity by coming out, but this has to be balanced with the expectations of his children's expectations and heteronormative assumptions of being a father.

5.4 Summary

The analysis presented in this chapter confirms coming out is both complex and challenging and is more than a one-time event. Participants reached a point where they no longer felt able to manage competing identities and saw no option but to come out. Fathers positioned this dilemma as a dichotomy they could no longer manage and they felt they had no choice but to openly identify as gay and this drew attention to coming out and prevented it being a mundane act. The decision to come out to wives led to changes in married relationship, as foregrounding an identity as a gay man impacted on the heteronormative expectations of the being a husband. During this period, which often lasted for a number of years; fathers foregrounded their identity as a gay man, which for married fathers had been private. This was complex, as when fathers had reached the point where they felt no longer able to live as a 'straight' man, this had been preceded by many years of active management to maintain the pretence of a straight identity, but alongside this time to prepare for foregrounding a gay self-identity. In contrast, for their wives, the revelation from their husband was generally a complete shock. Even when they had had some knowledge of their husband having had sexual contact with another man before their marriage, this action was seen as relatively insignificant as it had been followed by years of marriage.

For children, the revelation by their father of being gay was even more unsuspected and this made coming out to children the most challenging aspect of this renegotiation for fathers. However, fathers wanted, and in many cases had to, due to changes of how the family lived and interacted together, be open and accountable for this change to their children. For married fathers identifying

as gay was accepted as it problematised their relationship with their wife as being a husband in a heterosexual marriage and a gay man were seen as incompatible subject-positions. In contrast foregrounding a gay subject-position was presented as causing significant disruption to the practice of being a father. Therefore coming out to children was positioned as one of the most difficult acts of the process. Fathers were concerned about the potential disruption that coming out could have on their subject-position as a father. To manage this required on-going negotiation to allow them to still be seen as meeting the expected rules and practices of being a father while identifying as a gay man was challenging. The heteronormative assumptions of fatherhood led to polarised positions, where being gay is positioned at one end of a binary, and being a father at the opposite end. In these situations, fathers faced a dilemma, drawing on a liberal humanist discourse provided a framework for fathers to foreground a gay subject-position however this risked being seen as authentic in their subject-position as a father within a heteronormative construction of family. Overall, what started as a renegotiation of identity and coming out process fathers, becomes a coming out process for families that has to be continually renegotiated. The following chapter discusses the process of families coming out and the repositioning of their identity within and outside the family.

CHAPTER SIX

6. Challenging heteronormative expectations: coming out as a family

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter analysed the process of married fathers coming out. Being in a married heterosexual relationship with an assumed 'straight' identity and having children were governed by heteronormative expectations. The process of coming out, where fathers foregrounded a gay subject position, violated many of the dominant rules and duties expected of heterosexual families. As a result, fathers had to account for their decision for foregrounding a gay identity. As discussed in Chapter two, coming out is characterised by various models (e.g. Cass, 1979; Brady and Busse, 1994; D'Augelli 1994) but these focus on the individual who identifies as gay in the coming out process. However, a post-structuralist view sees identity as multiple and fragmented, which is evident in the accounts from fathers. The implications of foregrounding their identity as a gay man and father, often for a number of years, in unproblematised heterosexual subject positions of husband and father are broad, complex and impact on a number of people both within families and the wider community. The notion of multiple identities emphasises that people foreground and background identities in response to the world they live in and the actions they take (Ward and Winstanley, 2005). For participants, the action of coming out presented challenges, however, these challenges were not confined to them. The act of foregrounding a subject position as a gay man means that coming out becomes a process for the whole family, not just the father. This chapter presents an analysis of the coming out process, from the viewpoint of fathers, for the family and explores the complex accountability on all members of the family for the actions they take and in response to the actions of other members of the family.

6.2 Coming out as a family

The act of coming out is undertaken by a person who wants to publicly position their sexual identity as non-heterosexual. However, for a person identifying as gay constructing coming out as an event that is completed is inaccurate. In a world where heterosexuality is privileged by heteronormative discourses there is a requirement to come out again and again, hence it is more a process than an event. For married fathers, identifying as gay it is even more complex as their subject positions as a husband and father impacts on the process and requires renegotiation, as reported by participants, by all family members to continually (re)construct their varied identities and reality of family. Fathers identifying as gay has an impact on family interactions between immediate and extended family members. When a father identifies as gay he challenges the heteronormative assumptions, rules and practices of family. Consequently, the gay father and other family members are held accountable and this requires managing to locate their new family identities within the rules and duties of heteronormative discourses.

For fathers, the time and space to modify their identity to be openly gay had been constructed over time, often many years. In contrast for their wives and child(ren) this time and space had not been available. Drawing on a liberal humanist discourse fathers wanted to foreground their identity as a gay man and be open with the people around them. They had had time to re-position their identity to reach a point of self-acceptance of a salient gay identity. However, their wives and children had less time to negotiate this change and this presented challenges. In extract 1 Thomas accounts for the decision to tell others outside the family to justify how these actions were taken to ensure that the children had support after his disclosure.

Extract 1

1. Thomas Well the rationale, we told [the children], well
2. I'll try and tell you the reason we told, it's the
3. same reason for understanding better telling
4. people at the school... Basically the rationale
5. was, and sorry, the parents of a couple of their
6. closest friends, so the idea was that each circle
7. of people on a need to know basis the adults
8. would know in case the children said anything.
9. In case they appeared to be upset or, and also
10. we told the children, so that they knew that if
11. they wanted to they could tell them if they
12. wanted to talk about it so they knew that they
13. wouldn't have to keep it a secret sort of thing.

Overall the account details that careful thought of how best to manage this to support his children is evident, which emphasises how a father identifying as gay challenges heteronormative discourses. The act of telling his children is also something that is done jointly by him and his wife and he explained how 'we' (lines 1 and 2), told the children but at the same time created a space where they could talk to others. Thomas takes steps to justify why it was necessary to tell other people. He states this is why people at each of the children's schools were told (lines 3 and 4) and the parents of some of their closest friends (line 5). However, this was managed carefully as he wanted to create a space for his children to be able to discuss this and not feel they, 'have to keep it a secret' (line 13). For fathers they had achieved foregrounding of their gay identity as part of the coming out process and they were ready and wanted to be open. However, telling their children was preceded by telling others outside the family, to ensure they could have someone to speak to and this created multiple locations where this potentially made children accountable for violating

heteronormative family expectations. This created a tension for fathers as practices are governed that expect them to act as protector of their children and their coming out potentially problematised this. Their decision to disclose their foregrounded gay identity was the same reason that disrupted their family set-up and relationships. Thomas softens the potential for criticism caused by this disruption by minimising the potential impact of this with phrases such as, 'in case' (line 8) and 'if they wanted to' (lines 10 and 11). So what was initially an act that required self-management by fathers, for Thomas's children they also had to engage in self-management of this outside the family, making coming out a process for all family members.

In all cases fathers continued to have significant contact with their children and wives through their role as parents. All fathers, except two (Dale and Karl) moved out of the family home and this was relevant as coming out led to the breakup of their family unit as it was and this then impacted on their practices as a family. When foregrounding of a gay identity led to separation between a participant and his wife and fathers moving out of the family home this made the change visible to those outside of the family home. However, participants acted to minimise changes to their practice as a father, as explained by Thomas in extract 2:

Extract 2

1. Thomas Um, but there is another couple that we have
2. stayed close with who we certainly don't see
3. any less of and I think possibly over time we
4. see more of.
5. Interviewer Separately?
6. Thomas No, no, I mean together. Sometimes I find
7. these occasions when we go out for meals
8. together, the two of us and the children and

9. the two of them and the children a bit funny
10. because you could be a fly on the wall and you
11. could think there is no difference at all.

Thomas constructs his subject position as a father as being no different in this social situation. Even though he has moved out of the family home part time he and his wife have remained friends with another family although in the first part of the quote it is not clear if this contact is separately or with his wife and children. Clarification is provided, in response to a prompt ('separately' - line 5), that this is together and Thomas accounts for how his coming out, in this situation, has not disrupted the family and interactions with these friends and how it could be seen by others as no different. The action of coming out is complex and the account confirms how it impacts on social event that involve all family members. For some established practices as a family foregrounding a gay identity (e.g. living all together in the same house) heteronormative duties and rights of family life are abandoned or modified and for others (e.g. occasional social events), such as that described by Thomas in the extract two, life seems unchanged. Thomas reflects on this and argues to those outside the family, who know it could be a 'bit funny because you could be a fly on the wall and ... think there is no difference at all (lines 10 and 11). However, for those outside who do not know the interactions continues to provide a location to act as a family and for this not to be problematised. The account confirms that the act of coming out is not a one off event but a process that is likely to need active self-management by all family members while heteronormative discourses continue to frame what is seen as acceptable practices and positions of family life. Further confirmation of this is provided by Nigel in extract 3, accounting for how he felt other people positioned him whilst staying on a campsite during a summer holiday with his children.

Extract 3

1. Nigel I really felt my difference. A) being a single dad,
2. but B) being a gay dad, a gay man, sorry, because
3. I am surrounded by all this heterosexuality.
4. Interviewer Right.
5. Nigel And erm, that feels quite hard actually as I am
6. surrounded by all this. For several reasons. You
7. know I really feel my minorityness. You know,
8. nobody ever really looks me up and down and
9. says "what are you doing here on your own with
10. these kids?". I don't get that, but there is a
11. certain amount of standoffishness.

Nigel accounts for how the act of foregrounding a subject position as a gay man has led to feeling marginalised by others when he is on holiday with his children. He explained that this was not through any direct challenge from others but through 'standoffishness' (line 11), which makes him accountable for being '... 'here on your own with these kids' (lines 9 and 10) as he positions himself as a 'single dad' (line 1), which emphasised his singleness alongside his gay identity and how both impact on how he is made accountable. There is an expectation for him to account for intruding on family space and this emphasises his minority status, which identifying openly as a 'gay dad' has foregrounded. However, he contradicts this and amends it to 'gay man'; emphasising his sexual identity as being parallel to his identity as a father, but not wanting to be exclusively identified as a gay father. Nigel provides an account of how coming out disrupted dominant heteronormative discourse family – a straight father accompanied by a wife/mother in the co-parent role. This is complex, as although there are no explicit actions by other holidaymakers at the campsite, he interprets the actions of other parents on the campsite as making him accountable for being different

because he is there alone with his children '... surrounded by all this heterosexuality' (line 3) and he does not fit this dominant position. The expectation of accountability for pursuing a gay identity is also evident from other family members, as discussed by Dale in extract 4:

Extract 4

1. Interviewer You mentioned your father, do, outside your
2. immediate family do other family members
3. know?
4. Dale I've been totally open about it so in my own
5. generation of those who we see they are
6. perfectly aware, no problems. For my father's
7. generation it is a different matter. They all now
8. know, much to his regret. I had er, there's him
9. and two sisters and we still go out together
10. once a month for a meal and so forth, it is a
11. thing they have done for many, many years.
12. Erm, I will say this I think my father is
13. homophobic but I don't criticise him for it
14. because I think it is a generational thing more
15. than anything,
16. Ok, and I accept that he has those views.
17. Interviewer So in a sense, from what you have said though
18. would it be a fair statement that your father is
19. not accepting of you?
20. Dale I suppose it is typified by, 'well if you have kept
21. it hidden for 30 years why can't you carry on
22. keeping it hidden?'

Dale provided an account of how his father did not agree with Dale's decision to come out to other family members. Dale and his father have polarised of what is

necessary and acceptable in terms of him coming out to family members. Dale, drawing on a liberal humanist discourse, is 'totally open' about his sexual identity (line 3) and; his father not understanding why, '... if you have kept it hidden for 30 years why can't you carry on keeping it hidden?' (lines 20 to 22) . Dale explained his father, who he described as homophobic (line 13), has difficulties accepting his foregrounded gay identity. He explained his father is regretful that his son has identified publicly as gay and wishes that he had not come out. However, in response to being asked if his father is not accepting of his public identity as a gay man, he softens accountability with reference to it being a 'generational thing more than anything...' (line 14 and 15). Dale described his father as homophobic but avoided personal blame by attributing that view to his age - avoiding the need for his father to accept personal agency for holding views that explicitly problematised his son's gay identity. He reduces accountability for holding homophobic views by linking it to his father's generation, emphasising how epistemic views of homosexuality were very different in the past and how this continues to govern expectations today. Dale accounted for his coming out process within his immediate family as being accepted, but the implications for living as a gay father, which disrupt the dominant heteronormative discourse of family, his actions are seen as unnecessary after so many years of living a perceived straight identity by older family members. Dale restricts problematising his father's actions, by suggesting they may be 'typified' (line 20) by those of his generation. This avoids him having to attach a category of complete and on-going hostility from his father for foregrounded gay identity, but makes clear that there is definite resistance. Historically there was not space for non-heterosexual identities and his father draws on these heteronormative expectations. This makes coming out and foregrounding a gay identity a complex process that has to be managed by wider family members as well as immediate family. It also places accountability on fathers who take the decision to foreground a gay identity and disrupting the expectations that accompany being a husband and father. The process of coming out is not an act that individuals

can take in isolation from others. Family members are impacted by coming out and in turn impact on the level of openness that fathers have over their gay identity. The level of support or resistance that fathers receive is dynamic as it has the on-going potential to modify the positions of all members of the family. In extract 5 Tony accounted for how his father managed his coming out:

Extract 5

1. Tony There's no way, certainly not from family.
2. They are not anti but they are not supportive.
3. Erm, erm, my dad has barely spoken about my
4. sexuality at all. The closest we got to a
5. conversation about it. We were down at his
6. place, he lives down at Eastbourne, and we
7. were down there once and he sort of pointed
8. randomly at this pub and he said "that's one
9. of your places".

Tony's family is aware he is gay and in response to being asked how accepting they are and how this is managed Tony explained that there is no support, 'certainly not from family' (line 1). He argued that his family have managed his coming out and justified this with reference to his father arguing, 'my dad has barely spoken about his sexuality at all' (lines 3 and 4). The account suggests that there is no acceptance of his identity as a gay man and the way this is managed by his parents is to avoid speaking about it, which regulates being gay as problematic and immoral. Tony referred to a conversation between him and his father where, referring to a gay pub, his father described it as 'one of your places'. Later in the interview there is an exchange and his father questioned why gay pubs are needed:

Extract 6

- 1 Tony 'I don't understand why you people need your own places'.

Tony's father displays resistance to his son's gay identity by not speaking about it and then questions why gay people need their own spaces. He constructs a reality where a gay identity and gay culture are invisible. Neither extract 5 or 6 display explicit hostility to homosexuality but there is a complete lack of acknowledgement of non-heterosexual identities, even though his son has identified as gay and has lived with his male partner for a number of years. Identifying as gay is problematised by him and consequently and he manages this by resist his gay identity. He has maintained contact with extended family by drawing on his authentic position as a father. This is maintained by him and his children with reference to heteronormative family norms and managing his coming out by backgrounding his gay identity when interacting with extended family members. This shows how the process of being out is managed according to socially regulated expectations. In extract 7, Nigel explained how his parents, as well as his children, as having to manage his coming out and them not feeling able to be open with his uncle or nieces. His account starts with reference to his daughter and how his coming out requires negotiation by the extended family:

Extract 7

1. Nigel She is basically very supportive and erm, but her
2. issue, and I totally empathise with her and feel
3. very frustrated on her behalf is; it becomes not
4. just a coming out issue for the father, it becomes
5. a coming out issue for the kids and other people
6. in the family like my parents. So my parents don't
7. feel able to come out about their gay son to my
8. uncle. My daughter does not feel able to come
9. out to her cousins when they come here which I
10. feel massively frustrated about.

There is implicit acceptance of his foregrounded identity as a gay man from his parents but they do not want to come out to his uncle about his gay identity and

his daughter does not want to come out to her cousins (lines 8 and 9). This is complex as Nigel positions himself as being 'massively frustrated about' the situation (line 10) but, also demonstrates understanding of how his gay identity has led to accountability for other family members. This presents a tension for Nigel. In chapter five extract two, he accounted for the challenge of reconstructing his sexual identity as gay, which took a number of years and he sought professional support to achieve this. Within the family home Nigel, although he considered the potential impact of coming out, retained agency in repositioning his sexual identity. However, his agency is challenged by the response of others, as they implicitly place accountability on him for foregrounding his gay identity. Nigel explained the difficulties his parents had as they, 'don't feel able to come-out about their gay son to my uncle' (lines 7 and 8) and how his daughter 'does not feel able to come out to her cousins' (lines 8 and 9). This has similarities to extract 4 where Dale reports his father's regret that he had told members of the extended family about his gay identity.

Coming out is not confined to the person identifying as gay but becomes a process that all members of the family have to negotiate to a greater or lesser extent. It also impacts on the level of agency of participants to be open about their gay identity. Family members may not oppose the foregrounding of a gay identity but are aware of how this challenges heteronormative discourses of family and in-turn this makes each person in a family accountable to those outside of the family for managing this process. On-going negotiation is required by all members of the family to manage the coming out process and respond to practices that are governed as acceptable or unacceptable in different spaces for being a part of a family with a gay father. For participants identity is central to many interactions. They may not always want to come out to others, but because of dominant heteronormative assumptions, which the extracts above illustrate, participants either have to keep their gay identity backgrounded to avoid accountability among family members or by foregrounding their identity

manage accountability for other family members having to manage the process of coming out. For Harry in extract 8, even after coming out the challenges of managing his own identity against the expectations of his children are evident.

Extract 8

1. Harry No I think once my kids are ok I will feel more of
2. a whole person. Because now I have been able
3. to tell everybody, it's like so not an issue
4. anymore. But it is like that little bit of my life
5. still feels closeted, it just feels wrong. Erm, I
6. managed to live a long time hiding and erm, as
7. soon as I wasn't hiding anymore it just felt like
8. the floodgates opened and it just felt necessary
9. to tell everybody but, not tell everybody but not
10. to hide it from anybody.

He expresses a desire that his children will be 'ok' with his foregrounded gay sexual identity at some future point with him being able to 'feel more of a whole person' (line 1 and 2). Even though Harry has come out, he feels his identity as a gay man remains 'closeted' when it is in tension with his position as a father. Fathers do not just move from being 'in' to being 'out'. This involves on-going complex negotiation to manage a gay identity alongside maintaining a father identity. It is not a case of one replacing the other, but both needing to co-exist alongside each other. The ability for these to exist alongside each other, is integrated with and has to be negotiated according to, expectations of discourses that frame practices and positions. Harry also has to negotiate the dilemma created as a result of being out. He no longer wants to background his gay identity and 'hide it away from anybody' (line 10), but this has to be managed alongside the expectations of his children and family. The act of fathers coming out required children to engage in self-management in disclosing their father's gay identity. This risked problematising their family and being held

accountable for not meeting the heteronormative expectations of family or; avoid disclosure and engage in self-regulation to try and avoid others discovering their father identified as gay. This is demonstrated by Thomas in extract 9, who reports how his children responded to their father's disclosure:

Extract 9

1. Thomas So I don't think he really told anybody at
2. school. My daughter said she didn't think she
3. would tell anybody, her closest friend she might
4. tell after a few days.

Thomas explained how his son and daughter responded to whether and when they would disclose their father's sexual identity to their peers. He provided an account of how his children managed this as relatively 'matter of fact' and not spoken about in depth with phrases such as 'I don't think' (line 1) and 'she might tell', (lines 3 and 4) as something not discussed in depth or requiring further thought at that time. The account minimises the potential impact of coming out and suggests it is not problematised by his son and daughter. The decision to disclose to friends is complex and requires consideration over time as Thomas' response from his daughter shows (lines 2 and 3). This is situated in the context of dominant and dynamic historical and cultural expectations of parenting and family life, which presents complex challenges that children have to negotiate in their day-to-day interactions. Nigel, in extract 10, accounts for this:

Extract 10

1. Interviewer You have said a bit about this but I wanted to
2. come back to it. How open are both your
3. children about your sexuality outside the
4. family?
5. Nigel Not at all is what I would say and that's
6. because I think there's a coming out issue for

7. them as there is for me. I hope as time goes by
8. erm, that if the opportunity arose they would
9. feel alright about talking about it. I am trying
10. to equip them for that task. With both of them
11. I have said that you don't have to go around
12. announcing this in every situation but one day,
13. in a particular situation, you might want to and
14. I want to be really clear with you I am fine with
15. that.

Nigel emphasised how neither children chose, nor felt able, to be open about their father's foregrounded gay identity with people outside their family. Being straight is privileged over being gay and is not confined to Nigel alone as he argued, '...there's a coming out issue for them as there is for me' (lines 6 and 7). Nigel stated, 'you don't have to go around announcing this in every situation' (lines 11 and 12) as a way of telling his children it is alright for them not to be open, but also suggests, '... but one day, in a particular situation, you might want to' (lines 12 and 13) and hopes one day they may choose too. This confirms Nigel is aware that a homosexual identity challenges the dominant notion of family, but hopes that at some point in the future one or both of his children may feel able to challenge this. In everyday interactions of this type heterosexuality would most likely be assumed and never questioned and to do so would expose them to the '...coming out issue' (line 6). He explained his frustration at the impact of dominant heterosexism and how his children are influenced by it but argued, '...to be really clear with you I am fine with that' (lines 14 and 15) as he understands that his identity is problematised by heteronormative expectations rather than blaming his children. The fact they do not feel able to be open about his gay identity is a product of dominant heterosexist views that are beyond control by his children. This demonstrates the challenge of managing their father's foregrounded gay identity. Similar to Nigel, in extract 11, Dale explained

how he supported his son to manage his foregrounded identity made it clear that it was his son's choice whether he came out to his friends.

Extract 11

1. Dale So when I did come out I did say to him if you
2. want to share it that's fine, if you don't want
3. to share it that's fine. It's up to you. The
4. sharing was quite natural and normal, it wasn't
5. a staged event, it just happened.
6. Interviewer And did he share it first?
7. Dale He shared it first with his mates, which is
8. appropriate. It is not up to me to say, 'oh by
9. the way, I'm Chris's dad and I am gay'
10. Interviewer Yes
11. Dale It was up to him to decide who and when and
12. what and all the rest of it. And he did, it was all
13. quite natural and nobody said I wouldn't have
14. guessed, I've always known or whatever. No,
15. nothing like that, it was just totally acceptance.

In contrast to Nigel's children, Dale's son made the decision to come-out to his friends about his father's gay identity. Dale explained the idea of his son sharing his foregrounded gay identity as, 'quite natural and normal' (lines 3 and 4) and explained that his son did disclose it to others. Dale accounted for this as being done in a matter of fact way and not as something different or surprising, minimising the potential change on members of the family. Dale was clear that it was his son's decision whether to do this or not, allowing him to decide how he responded and who he shared it with. Again, this constructs the process of coming out as an issue for family members in their interactions with others. The response from his friends is reported as 'just totally acceptance' (line 15) suggesting no surprise at their response and making it unremarkable. How

children manage disclosure of their father's gay identity to others outside the family is also influenced by other factors, such as whether they have a partner. Thomas recounted in extract 12 his daughter's decision to tell two of her peers about him identifying as gay:

Extract 12

1. Thomas So anyway, these two girls sort of had a bit of a
2. go at her for being upset, they were, were
3. definitely not the sort of people she would have
4. told but she said that my dad's told me that he
5. is gay. Um, she never had any trouble from
6. them at all but in the past they had bullied her
7. so that is kind of interesting isn't it?

His daughter had been upset at school and two girls 'had a bit of a go at her' (line 1) because of this. Thomas explained his surprise at the two individuals that his daughter told as he saw them as '... definitely not the sort of people she would have told' (lines 3 and 4) although no account of what this means is provided. Thomas recounted his daughter was upset and this is why she told them and justified his surprise by explaining that in the past they had bullied her. There is an implicit link in his account that because, 'in the past they have bullied her' (line 6) they would do so again because of her disclosure and the perceived accountability that living in a family with a gay father, which violated the dominant heteronormative discourse of family life, placed on her. In the account he acknowledged that she never 'had any trouble from them at all' for disclosing (lines 5 and 6) and demonstrated his surprise with his rhetorical question at the end of the account, 'so that is kind of interesting, isn't it?' (line 7). The extract positions his foregrounded gay identity as making his daughter accountable for her family life no longer fitted the normal [heterosexual] construction of family life. This raises issues around agency. Fathers have demonstrated agency by identifying as gay, although this has happened for the majority of participants a

number of years into heterosexual marriage and this placed ownership for managing the foregrounding of their father's gay identity on all members of the family. Children, as adults, will manage and resit accountably in different ways. In extract 13, Ben explained how his children managed discussions about his gay identity.

Extract 13

1. Interviewer And thinking about the children now, and again
2. this situation may not arise, are any of your
3. children open with people outside the house
4. about your sexuality?
5. Ben Don't know. It's not something we have
6. discussed, probably not. Nobody has ever
7. mentioned it or there has been no interest from
8. anybody so I am assuming not. But then again it
9. is on the back boiler at the moment because I
10. have not actually had anybody in my life for a bit.

Ben has sole custody of his children and they live together full-time. Ben's initial response to being asked how open his children are about his gay identity is, 'don't know' (line 5) but he accounted for this by explaining it is not something they have discussed. He qualified this immediately by explaining, referring to his children, that, 'nobody has ever mentioned it...' (line 6) and there being, 'no interest from anybody...' (line 7). This minimises the level of relevance he attaches to the question. He also argued his gay identity as not overly relevant at present because he does not have a partner, so it is, '...on the back boiler at the moment' (lines 8 and 9). The issue of his sexual identity and how members of the family manage this outside the family home is minimised by Ben as he does not have a partner and has not had one for a period of time. For Ben coming out was done after he had separated from his wife and had full-time custody of his children. It had been some time since he had a partner and he actively managed

his positions as a father and gay man separately (see extract 23) which he accounted for as being possible as he does not currently have a partner.

Extracts 1-13 account for how children and other members respond to fathers foregrounding their gay identity. The family environment impacts on this and coming out as a gay man is problematised more when this occurs within marriage, confirming the impact of heteronormative family discourses. As well as managing interactions between family members and the initial disclosure of children to peers the regulations of family space that expects heterosexuality places an ongoing expectation on children to account for their father's foregrounded identity and this is discussed in the following section.

6.3 Re-inscribing the heteronormative family

The impact of these fathers coming out impacted on family members in different ways. The disclosure of a gay sexual identity by fathers positioned families as different to dominant heteronormative discourses of family, and this required ongoing self-management to avoid accountability for violating heteronormative expectations of fatherhood, marriage and family. Family members responded to heteronormative expectations by re-inscribing these dominant discourses censoring interactions in day-to-day practice to remain within authentic constructs of family. This was particularly evident in accounts from participants for their daughters, who displayed implicit or explicit levels of censorship to background their father's gay identity and appear as a 'normal' family. Brad's daughter was happy to participate in the gay community as detailed in extract 14, but there was caution in this not being perceived as 'gay' by her peers:

Extract 14

1. Brad The middle one [daughter] has been down to
2. Soho and Ipswich Pride. Pictures with Gaydar
3. guys and all that. She showed all her friends at
4. school but they don't know what it is, they think

5. it is Mardi Gras.

Brad explained his daughter is accepting of his sexual identity when in the privacy of her family setting or with her father, but is cautious about her friends knowing. This censoring is demonstrated by Brad when he explained that his daughter attends Pride events and 'showed all her friends at school but they don't know what it is...' (line 4). So although she attends gay events this is actively managed to avoid any association with the morally unacceptable practices of gay culture. This complex negotiation insulates Brad from any accountability from others for taking his daughter to these events as they may not be seen as fitting moral expectations of heteronormative family practices. However, it also backgrounds his sexual identity as something that is not to be shared with others. This censoring has a potential exclusionary impact as it requires complex negotiation by Brad's daughter in her interactions with her peers. This creates a potential binary for her. On the one hand not wanting to foreground her father's gay identity in her interactions with others. In contrast, avoiding accounting openly about her actions (e.g. I went to a Pride festival) and having to deal with problems created by not open about having a gay father for fear of being excluded because her family does not fit heteronormative expectations of family and there is not a visible space for her family to be accepted. Similarly, in extract 9 (section 6.2) Thomas accounted for his daughter's response as rational and mature by suggesting that part of her reaction to his coming out was consideration of how she would account for her father's foregrounded gay identity when necessary in her interactions with friends. His account suggested a considered response from her where she is accepting of his coming out, but also perceives there are potential difficulties with her friendships if she revealed her father now identified as gay. This constructs a tension between subject positions as a father and gay man and how this can be negotiated to avoid them being problematised. This clearly highlights the on-going nature of coming out as a process that all members of the family

have to manage not as a one-off event but time and time again. The challenge for Harry's daughter in accounting for her father's foregrounded gay identity and being located as part of a gay family is detailed in extract 15.

Extract 15

1. Interviewer You mentioned your daughter and her
2. boyfriend. Do you know if she said anything to
3. him or any of her close friends?
4. Harry No.
5. Interviewer She hasn't?
6. Harry No, because I said something about my
7. partner and he [her boyfriend] was in another
8. room. I said, I said something about Paul [his
9. partner] and she said, 'shush, he'll hear' and I
10. said Steph, you ought to just tell him and she
11. has already started this relationship on a lie
12. and she didn't like me lying! And then er,
13. apparently she burst into tears with her
14. mother and said that I had said this and it was
15. all terrible so then I got an earful from her
16. mother saying I shouldn't say things like that.
17. So no, she hasn't, she definitely hasn't.

Harry described an interaction between him and his daughter where he makes reference to his male partner. His daughter reacts negatively to this as she is concerned that her boyfriend will overhear her father and realise that his new partner is male. Harry challenges her response as problematic as she has, '...started the relationship on a lie' (line 11) and she held him accountable when he came out as she argued he had been lying to her mother, her brother and her and this was not acceptable. Harry draws on her moral position to hold his daughter accountable for her decision to conduct her relationship with openness

and honesty. Her father explained that his daughter's boyfriend is aware that her mother and father are separated, but his daughter has censored telling her boyfriend about her father's gay identity. In the relationship between her and her boyfriend she has clearly located her family as fitting expected norms, reinscribing heteronormative expectations. She has also engaged her mother in supporting her version of reality as Harry reported how he, 'got an earful from her mother...' (lines 15 and 16) for challenging his daughter's decision not to disclose her father's gay identity.

Harry's foregrounded gay identity raises two broad issues. Firstly his daughter censors his gay identity when her boyfriend is present and this requires Harry to background the identity he spent years aiming for self-acceptance of. Secondly, his account constructs his daughter as extremely cautious of their interactions when her boyfriend is present, as it could disrupt his heteronormative assumptions about her family. The impact of dominant heteronormative views of family life serve to place her father in a minority because of his foregrounded gay identity. This self-management is an example of how dominant ideals create authentic subject positions and privileges certain families (e.g., straight father) over others (e.g. gay father) and her father identifying as gay problematised her family and makes her accountable to others (e.g. her boyfriend). There is no explicit reference to what she expected to happen if her boyfriend found out her father identifies as gay but the assumption is that he will hold her accountable and this will problematize their relationship and lead to them splitting up.

Actions such as this, which place accountability on individuals violating dominant heteronormative expectations, serve to maintain exclusionary practices and contribute to homophobia. Secondly, it problematised the relationship between father and daughter as he wants her to be open about his identity and she cannot do that and she wants the version of family reality she previously had and he cannot occupy a position as a straight father. Harry accounted for his daughter becoming upset when retelling the interaction with her father to her

mother because he, 'shouldn't say things like that' (line 15) referring to him discussing his male partner within earshot of her boyfriend. It is unlikely that this conversation would take place if her father and mother had split up and his new partner was female. Harry's wife morally locates herself with her daughter and challenges Harry about the interaction. The implication is that Harry should have managed the interaction by backgrounding his gay identity around his daughter to minimise the potential for others to find out about his gay identity. His coming out requires all members of the family to manage their interactions with people outside the family and for Harry's daughter she re-inscribes heteronormative expectations to do this. This interaction took place approximately 18 months after her father first disclosed his gay identity to his daughter, but the challenge of managing this as a family is still evident. This is confirmed by Harry's assertion that his daughter has still 'definitely' (line 16) not disclosed his sexual identity to anyone outside the family home because of the fear of negative reactions. The requirement for censorship from children about their father's sexual identity was also requested from Brad's daughters:

Extract 16

1. Interviewer Thinking about that, are you friends with other
2. parents?
3. Brad What gay parents?
4. Interviewer No, straight parents.
5. Brad Oh yeah, they know nothing.
6. Interviewer They know nothing because - is that because you
7. would happily tell them but you are being
8. respectful because of your daughters?
9. Brad Yes, my daughters have said not to say anything
10. to them. How they have not put two and two
11. together I do not know.

Brad had been divorced for a number of years, had lived with a partner for three years, but explained that 'straight' parents of his daughters' friends are not aware of his gay identity as matter-of-fact. In response to being asked if they know he identified as gay he replies, 'oh yeah, they know nothing' (line 5). The phrase 'oh yeah' suggests that he does not see this problematic. The question could be asked - why should they know? However, by not knowing, he has had to carefully manage his interactions and regulate what information he can share. It is likely, when he was with his partner, this meant managing interactions between him and his partner to avoid revealing their relationship when any of his daughter's friends were in the house and needing to exercise caution when conversing with other parents to ensure that no aspect of his conversation gave the impression that he was not straight. The implications of this on family interactions with all those outside the family home is challenging, as to maintain the construction of being a single straight father, to stop others putting, '...two and two together' (lines 10 and 11) required on-going regulation. All interactions, such as taking children to school, interacting with other parents socially, when friends of his daughters visit, when his daughters visit their friends' houses have to be carefully managed.

This creates an on-going binary, where within the family home there is openness between father and daughters but when they interact with others, either inside or outside the home, heteronormative expectations impose accountability and they censor their identity so there is no evidence of a non-heterosexual identity and this is managed by re-inscribing heteronormative assumptions. Brad appears to minimise the impact of this on him by explaining his daughters do not want him to be open with others (lines 9 and 10) but he does not do this, reinforcing his gay identity as an immoral position. In extract 17, in response to being asked about the response of his children to him being out and managing this as a family, Harry linked his daughter's response to her relationship with her mother:

Extract 17

1. Harry And I think possibly mother-daughter, I think
2. she kinda felt closer to my wife in a sense. Yeah,
3. I think sort of what's going on with this man
4. who has suddenly said these things.

Harry drew on a common sense heteronormative discourses of daughters being closer to their mother (line 2), as a key explanation for his daughter's difficulty in accepting his foregrounded gay identity as he had disrupted the family and his marriage and he was held accountable for this by his daughter. He accounted for her response in a sense of disbelief – why has my father, '... suddenly said these things?' (line 4). Identifying as a gay man after all this time is contradictory to the expectations of being a father and family and his daughter is also now accountable, at least to some degree, for this in her social interactions. Through this account Harry clearly acknowledged how his repositioned identity has implications for all members of the family both inside and outside the family home. Brad, who has three daughters, reflected on the challenges of managing his father and gay identities in extract 18:

Extract 18

1. Brad If I could do the whole thing over again then I
2. wouldn't have kids because it has caused quite
3. a lot of problems in my life.

He presented being a father, having children and managing this alongside his gay identity as challenging and having caused, '... a lot of problems' (line 3) and if he had known this it may have stopped him becoming a father. His daughters expected him to present their family as fitting traditional heteronormative expectations as they saw this as providing a location to be seen as a legitimate family but do to so, had to ensure their practices were seen as legitimate to family life. Brad managed this by backgrounding his family identity both outside

(see extract 15) and inside (see extract 24) the family home. Although there are differences between fathers' reports and the response from their daughters, there is consistency in their overall response. Their father's gay identity is positioned negatively and/or as something to be censored from others, either explicitly or implicitly, for long periods of time since their father identified publicly as gay. Heteronormative family discourses continue to dominate and leave little or no space for non-heterosexual identities within families, which confirms the epistemic positioning of hegemonic masculinity has shown little change and heteronormative discourses still expect all men to be straight, find a girlfriend, get married and have children. There is no explicit evidence of homophobia from daughters in extracts 13-17, however, the impact of heteronormative expectations influence the actions of children and place accountability on fathers to modify how open they can be about their sexual identity with people outside the immediate family and this expectation was still evident in some cases years after they foregrounded their gay identity. For example, Ralph's daughter did not react negatively to his foregrounded identity but her boyfriend was positioned as homophobic by Ralph and this restricted her coming out to him about her father's foregrounded gay identity.

In contrast to how fathers reported the reaction from their daughters and the challenges that coming out presented, their accounts indicate that if there was a difference their sons reacted more positively. The reaction of Thomas' son in extract 19 typified the reaction from Kyle, Harry and Nigel when they accounted for their sons' responses.

Extract 19

1. Thomas My son has been much more relaxed about it.

Thomas summarised his son's position as being more relaxed about the whole situation (in comparison to his daughter). Where participants accounted for reasons why their daughters reacted more negatively to their foregrounded gay

identity this was related to disrupting the family home; unfairness on their mother; breaking the marriage vows and what was seen as inevitably less contact between them and their father. In contrast, sons were not reported by fathers as raising issues. There is variability in participants and their families for a variety of reasons. For example the age of the children; the presence of siblings; the past relationship between their mother and father; the reaction from extended family members and across the data corpus there is a clear sense of the dynamic nature of interactions, which evolve dependent on time and context. When participants accounted for problems that were foregrounded by their gay identity they consistently attributed greater accountability to them for problematising their family form. To manage this, their daughters utilised the strategy of re-inscribing heteronormative family constructions. However, daughters are not reported as arguing it is not acceptable to be gay per se. They problematised their fathers' foregrounded gay identity and been open to people outside the family, thus outing their children as being part of a gay family, as problematic. Therefore, when problems are foregrounded, fathers have to be accountable for their level of openness about their gay identity in response to resistance from their daughters.

A father identifying as gay makes the family different: being repositioned from part of the majority group - 'straight family' to being seen as a minority 'gay family'. The aspect that makes the coming out process that brings accountability is the social act: communicating this to other people in day-to-day interactions. Through social interactions people position and are positioned by others and being parts of a minority group (i.e. a gay family) places accountability on all members of the family to account the practices, rules and duties, particularly when these deviate from what is governed as legitimate. This repositioning also exposed children to constructions they are not familiar with and this unfamiliarity foregrounds accountability. To manage this children often drew on

the reality that is most familiar to them, heteronormativity. Nigel, in extract 20, accounts for how his daughter positions his sexual identity.

Extract 20

1. Nigel ... particularly in terms of my daughter's psyche,
2. that we are just a freaky minority and
3. unfortunately she is just exposed to
4. heterosexuality and homophobia and
5. heterosexism so the concept that anybody of a
6. different sexuality might come together at a given
7. time and LGBT people might be in a majority is
8. beyond her experience.

He argued that his daughter locates LGBT people differently to straight people. He accounted for her position based on heterosexism and homophobia that she has, and continues to be exposed to. For his daughter: gay people are seen as 'a freaky minority' (line 2) and her father now identifies as gay. This challenged how she managed her father's gay identity and the impact of this on how she and others locate their family. In her interactions with others this account constructs the reality of having a gay father in a world dominated by heterosexual norms. Nigel does not position his daughter as homophobic herself, but the constant heterosexism she has been exposed to has impacted on her and his foregrounded gay identity places expectations on her to account for the minority construction of her family. In lines 5 to 8, Nigel argued his daughter's experiences, which are limited by her age, to justify the difficulties of managing this in her interactions with others outside the family home. Accounting for being a minority family occurs in the context of dominant and dynamic historical and cultural expectations around parenting and family life. Her father's identity has disrupted heteronormative expectations. To manage this it is easier to resist disclosure of his gay identity than the power of heteronormativity that permeates social interactions and institutions and this is done by re-inscribing

heteronormative norms, similar to Harry's daughter in extract 15. This is also challenging to Nigel and to assist his daughter to manage this Nigel explained what action he would want to take.

Extract 21

1. Nigel Because why, get everybody down here, are you
2. sitting comfortable, get this, shall we have a cup
3. of tea, shall we move on? I mean that's as easy as
4. it would be for me but the painful thing in all of
5. this, is that you realise your own kids actually
6. internalised a load of shame about this issue in
7. the same way that I had and probably still have
8. because shame is so a difficult thing to shake off.

The account confirmed how people, who are important to him, have, 'internalised a load of shame about this issue in the same way that I had and probably still have' (lines 6 and 7), similar to his account of how his daughter constructs homosexuality and anyone who does not identify as straight in extract 21. His preferred action would be to simply get the family together, sit everyone together, tell them he is gay and move on (lines 1-3). However, he recognises the tension, although that action would be the right for him, it would foreground potential problems for his daughter or his parents. These two courses of action created a dilemma: take an active role in managing the coming out event to wider members of his family but risk problematising his relationship with his daughter and other family members. Or, accept the arguments put forward by his daughter and parents for not coming out to other members of the family and background his gay identity. This is not straightforward and he acknowledged that this is 'painful' (line 4) as their preference resonates with the denial, doubt and pressure he felt that delayed his coming out for many years. It also shows that although Nigel can demonstrate agency in taking up a subject position as a gay man. However, he has to allow space for others to manage the coming out

process in a way that enabled them to maintain legitimacy in their family and censorship of their father's gay identity was a common management strategy. The accountability children placed on their father's for coming out, implicitly and explicitly, continues well past the actual revelation, as shown by extract 22. Ralph is discussing how his children reacted to being told about plans for their parents to separate:

Extract 22

1. Ralph ... I don't think the older one, he thinks we're fair
2. enough to go ahead with the separation. One
3. thing we have, we talked about it but we didn't
4. talk about when we would tell them, but we told
5. my daughter anyway that we would probably be
6. getting divorced when she was going to university.

Ralph explained how his son reacted to being told, over a year after he came out to the family that he and his mother would separate. Ralph argued his son accepted the changing version of family reality as inevitable and a sensible outcome, '...he thinks we're fair enough to go ahead with the separation' (lines 1 and 2). He started to refer to his daughter, who is the elder of his two children (line 1) but did not complete this and moved on to account for his son's reaction. With his daughter he is less clear about what she has been told and how. Referring to what 'we' (him and his wife) have talked about in terms of separation he argued divorce between him and his wife as something that would 'probably' (line 5) happen when his daughter is at university. The divorce, with its legal ramifications, is more final than a separation. However, this is not presented as a certainty, which reduces accountability on Ralph for this action that will permanently split the family. Although Ralph has foregrounded his gay identity and is living away from the family home with his male partner (and his wife is living in the former family home with her partner) he argued that he and his wife will not divorce for a number of years, even though they have separated.

The timing of divorce is linked to his daughter going to university and this suggests that not divorcing enables him to maintain legitimacy as father and at least to some degree, by his actions, gain authenticity by re-inscribing heteronormative family constructions. Extract 22 implicates coming out as relevant to all members of the family for long periods after the initial disclosure, challenging the idea that it is a short term event that is relevant only to the individual identifying as gay and can be completed as suggested by a many of the models to explain the process. In extract 23, Thomas accounts for the on-going implications of identifying as a gay man and father:

Extract 23

1. Thomas There is still a thing actually about the outness.
2. Something I've got to sort out in another day or
3. two. I've been approached by a radio producer
4. about being interviewed about being a gay dad,
5. no gay parent. And there is this issue about
6. whether I am actually interviewed for the radio
7. because people will be able to recognise my
8. voice. And whether I use my real name or not
9. and the producers have asked me whether my
10. wife, would my wife like to be interviewed.

Thomas accounted for varied challenges following the initial disclosure. For example, he was asked to take part in a radio programme and discussed whether he felt able to be interviewed for a radio programme focusing on gay fathers. He remained accountable for identifying as a gay father because 'people may be able to recognise my voice' (lines 7 and 8). He also questioned whether he should use his real name or not (line 8). This account explained the tensions for Thomas between his foregrounded gay identity and maintaining an authentic position as a father and how actions, such as taking part in this interview, risk problematising these different identities if he is recognised by those who know

him and his family. Taking up a position as a gay father makes him accountable to his children and having a gay father makes his children accountable to others. In contrast, a straight identity would not need to be accounted for in the same way, differentiating a gay identity as something negative when compared to a straight identity. The decision to publicly identify as a gay man has disrupted the dominant heteronormative discourses associated with being a father: straight and provider/protector of the family. This account has similarities with extract 20, where Nigel argued his daughter had been influenced by heterosexism, with the result that anything that does not fit this dominant construction has to be explicitly explained. The legal, political and medical discourses that frame homosexuality have moved towards greater equality, however Thomas' account, where he could identify himself publicly as a gay father, had to be managed carefully as family discourse is still dominated by heteronormative expectations. The challenge of identifying as a gay man and being a father is complex and this extract shows how fathers have to negotiate, appraise and be accountable for managing their identities as a gay man and father. In extract 24, Ben accounts for the reasons why he has 'made a conscious effort' to manage his gay and father identities separately:

Extract 24

1. Interviewer Thinking about you as Ben who is a gay man
2. and you, Ben who is a father. How do those
3. two parts of your identity sit together?
4. Ben I suppose that is difficult. I probably have
5. made a conscious effort to keep them quite
6. apart at the moment because I haven't had a
7. partner. Erm, but I would think if erm, the
8. situation arose where a partner was becoming
9. a possibility then it would and we wanted to
10. go out as a family then there would be an

11. inclination to include a partner that so that
12. would be the point when the overlap would
13. start to happen. But at the moment they are
14. probably two distinctive parts of me at the
15. moment.

Ben has sole custody of his three children and he does not have a partner. He explained he has 'probably ... made a conscious effort' (lines 4 and 5) to keep his gay and father identities separate. Although he uses the term 'probably', later in the account he acknowledged that if he had a partner and they wanted to go out as a family then he would have 'an inclination' (lines 10 and 11) to allow his identities to 'overlap' (line 12). The implication for Ben living as a gay father is that he has to segregate two key aspects of his identity. Later in the interview Ben explained that one of the biggest difficulties for him is time. He finds it difficult to manage his commitments as a father and still have time for his gay identity. Being a single father takes time every day and he prioritises his identity as a father to provide for his children. From the account it was not clear how much Ben insulated his sexual identity from others because of identifying as gay although no reference to this being because he is gay is made, so his action of keeping them separate may be no different if he was straight and met a female partner. In contrast, Brad, who has shared custody with his ex-wife of his three daughters, in extract 25 explicitly re-inscribes heteronormative family expectations to manage his gay identity and relationship with his partner.

Extract 25

1. Interviewer May I ask did you live together?
2. Brad Oh, yes
3. Interviewer And in that sense...
4. Brad We had separate rooms
5. Interviewer Right, ok. I wasn't...
6. Brad It was never blatantly rubbed into the kids' faces,

7. ever. The only times we would sleep together
8. would be when the children weren't here. It was
9. purely out of respect for the children, which did
10. cause some problems. But erm...
11. Interviewer When you say purely out of respect for children, I
12. am just thinking a man and a woman would sleep
13. together so there is automatic sort of acceptance
14. Brad there that that is acceptable and that is all right...
15. They said it was alright, but er, I was uneasy
16. about it.

Brad argued his relationship with his partner, 'was never rubbed into the kids' faces, ever'. This is an unusual phrase to use and Brad went on to say this was out of respect for the children. An analogy was drawn by the interviewer to see how this would be positioned if it had, had a female partner? Brad responded that it was not his daughters who had imposed this sanction – 'they said it was alright' (line 15) – but he felt 'uneasy about it' (lines 15 and 16). This minimising strategy insulates his daughters from any potential criticism, but Brad also avoided responding specifically to the question that was being asked about how this would be different if it was a female partner before the question was fully posed. Brad appeared to be censoring his relationship with his partner even though he has identified as gay to his children. He argued identifying as gay to his children was acceptable but then sleeping with his partner, who he has lived with for over three years, when the children are in the house as unacceptable. From this interaction he does not display agency in claiming an open identity as a gay man and living as a couple would. The interaction in extract 25 suggests that heteronormative discourses that privilege heterosexual partnerships are impacting on how Brad constructs his relationship with his partner. The use of phrases about rubbing his daughters' faces in it (line 6); having respect for the children (line 9); being uneasy about it resonates with Nigel's account in extract 21 about internalising 'a load of shame'. The account shows the power of

heteronormative discourses to govern practices and for Brad and his partner this led to regulating space that prevented them sleeping in the same bedroom when his daughters were in the house. This creates a hierarchy between his identities where being a father is privileged by Brad over being a gay man in a relationship with his partner. For Brad his identities as a gay man and father seem incompatible and this offers an insight into why if he had his time again he may not have children (as detailed in extract 18) confirming how powerful heteronormative discourses continue to impact on how fathers position their gay and parenting identities. For Karl re-inscribing heteronormative family came from his expectation that children did not speak to other family members or people outside the family.

Extract 26

1. Karl You didn't talk to your grandparents about it,
2. you didn't talk to the people next door about it.
3. You could talk about it with your family and that
4. was it.

Being part of family offers each person a location for authenticity but they are accountable to the rights and duties that regulate the institution. Karl, has told his children about his foregrounded gay identity but expected his children should not disclose this to others outside of the family home and includes extended family members as part of this expectation. This expectation for self-regulation creates a dilemma. He has been open by asking his children disclose to others but this locates a gay identity as problematic and something that is seen as needing to be kept quiet. Karl is managing a moral position here as even though he has foregrounded his gay identity he has agreed with his wife that he will remain the family home. By requiring his children not to disclose his gay identity he is aiming to maintain the authentic subject positions associated with being part of a heterosexual family. While this action may be directed at protecting his children it problematised their family and makes his children accountable for

maintaining the perceived construction of their family. They are required to manage a version of reality to others outside the family that is no longer exists in the family home. This raises moral questions about why this was expected and how children would manage it but no explanation is provided in the account to address these questions. It is evident in this account how heteronormative family discourses, which govern what practices are accepted, serve to censor the actions of family members in managing what information can be shared, with who and makes them accountable if this is violated.

6.4 Summary

The analysis has shown that for fathers who identify as gay after marrying, coming out and identifying in a marginalised position, challenges heteronormative expectations and has to be managed. The idea that coming out is a time bound event and relevant only to the person coming out is challenged by the accounts in this chapter. By entering into (heterosexual) marriage and having children, men construct authentic positions as a husband and family but are governed and accountable to heteronormative family discourse (e.g. support and protect their family, hegemonic masculinity, identifying as straight). The social act of coming out challenges this discourse and makes all family members accountable to each other and to those outside of the family home. The act of coming out requires all members of the family to manage changing identities within their family social interactions the wider community. This emphasises that coming out is not an event that is completed but is on-going process with two distinct aspects: the initial disclosure and the on-going management of a non-heterosexual identity. Fathers have negotiated this first stage by disclosing to their children, but their families then have to negotiate this with others (e.g. friends, peers, school, and work colleagues) and manage the coming out process in much the same way as the person who identifies as gay. Secondly, all family members have to engage in the on-going management of coming out now their father identifies as gay. Participants, who have had time to renegotiate their

identity, coming out can be presented as mundane and not disrupting their position as a father. However, for children and other family members it is not mundane as it challenges heteronormative discourses and makes them accountable for violating social institutions and practices expected of families.

The level of 'outness' (how open fathers can be or how open other family members can be about their father's gay identity) is not a consistent and varies in different social situations and institutions. It is mediated according to the socio-cultural environment and this is mediated by heteronormative assumptions of family, parenting and other social institution's; and this be managed differently by each member of the family. A strategy employed by children and other family members was to manage their father's gay identity using censorship and this confirms that negative feelings and shame associated with homosexuality are still evident. Participants in this study accounted for more active censorship of their identity by their daughters compared to sons and this was positioned as being motivated by concern for their mother and difficulty with being different to other families. A discourse of heteronormativity is evident, through the practice of re-inscribing heteronormative family expectations as the most common approach to censorship. This was evident from children, parents of participants and participants themselves, who used multiple approaches to foreground heteronormative constructions of family to background participants' gay identity to continue to be seen as a legitimate family. The final chapter discusses the overall findings of the study, identifies the contribution the study makes to the academic area and discusses the implications of these for gay fathers and future research.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7 Key findings and conclusions

7.1 Introduction

Chapters four to six provide a detailed analysis of previously (heterosexually) married fathers accounting for their decision to avoid coming out and keep their gay sexual identity private (chapter 4); how they moved to foregrounding their gay identity (chapter 5) and; how they and their family managed the coming out process (chapter 6). This chapter will reiterate the overall purpose of the research and set out the key findings of the study. These will be discussed with reference to the literature reviewed in chapters one and two. An evaluation of the theoretical framework that guided the study will be presented, along with the key findings and the implications for further research. Finally the chapter will present a conclusion to the thesis.

7.2 Purpose of research

Over the past years the number of gay-parented families has been rising (Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013). However, the dominant discourses of fathering continue to be dominated by hegemonic masculinity expectations and a discourse of heteronormativity (Herek, 1990; Chapple, Kippax and Smith, 1998; Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013). Being a gay father challenges hegemonic masculinity expectations, as gay men are not seen to hold the same power over women (Connell, 2005). Gay men as parents challenges parenting expectations, as the dominant positioning of fathers is as provider rather than nurturer, a role more accustomed to mothers (Dryden, Doherty and Nicholson, 2010). Men who identify as gay and as a father violate heteronormative discourses and this brings accountability. The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of how gay men, who fathered children in a heterosexual marriage, managed the coming out process and potentially contradictory identities (being a father and gay man) following this. Although there have been socio-political advances that have improved the positioning of

homosexuality, the genealogical pathologising of homosexuality continues to impact on those who identify as gay (Drazenovich, 2012). As well as there being a dearth of research focused on gay-father families, much of the research that does exist has been conducted from a problematising perspective. It has approached gay-parented families looking for deficits in children, based solely on the fact that they have a parent(s) who are gay. There is also very little research focused on men who identify as gay later in adult life. This study responded to this by recruiting participants with the purpose of gaining an in-depth understanding of their experience of managing their foregrounded identity as a 'straight' father; how they negotiated the coming out, the foregrounding of a gay identity and the repositioning of their identities as a gay man and father. Participants were approached with the aim of enabling them to provide an in-depth account of how they managed the foregrounding of their identity and negotiated this both inside and outside the family.

7.3 Key findings

The study identified five key findings:

- A gay identity is more than a sexual identity - it is an intrinsic part of a persons' identity and the process of foregrounding a gay identity is seen as a right to be autonomous and by doing so challenge the regulation of homosexuality.
- Coming out is commonly referred to as a binary, with an individual being positioned as either 'in' or 'out'. Heteronormative discourses make it likely that individuals will never be completely 'out'.
- Coming out is a complex action that is mediated according to the socio-cultural environment and requires active on-going management.
- Coming out is not confined to the individual who identifies as gay. For previously heterosexually married fathers it is an action that all members of the family have to negotiate.

- Dominant constructions of parenting and families remain almost entirely heterosexually focused. This maintains heterosexual privilege and creates heterosexist expectations of families and gay families are evaluated, often negatively, against these.

For participants, claiming a public gay identity often took place over a number of years and was constructed as a complex journey. Claiming a public gay identity was significant as it was a process that contributed to resisting self-regulation from heteronormative discourse and a right to act autonomously, as discussed in 7.31. Discussion of the commonly accepted binary approach to coming out and the management of this in the socio-cultural environment are discussed in section 7.32. Section 7.33 discusses how foregrounding a gay identity has to be negotiated by all members of the family. As well as having to negotiate coming out, gay fathers and their families are evaluated against dominant heteronormative family discourses. The implications of this for gay fathers and their families are also discussed.

7.3.1 The impact of heteronormative privilege

Fathers spent a number of years concealing their gay identity. Accounts confirm that participants either considered a gay identity or were aware of their sexual attraction to other men during adolescence or as a young adult. However, heteronormative discourse and in some cases overt homophobia from negative discursive formations (Hall, 1997), led to them forming heterosexual relationships, marry and become a father to avoid guilt and shame (Plummer, 1995). Participants accounted for the time they became fathers with pride and fulfilment. However, over time fathers found it increasingly difficult to manage the conflict between their foregrounded straight and backgrounded gay identities. This created a dilemma for fathers as they felt unable to continue living with their assumed straight identity; but foregrounding a gay identity was seen as having the potential to irreconcilably damage their relationship with their children and other family members. Nonetheless, accounts from fathers

confirm that they no longer felt able to manage being a husband and father, with the expectation of managing morally acceptable practices for these subject positions to be seen as legitimate.

They reached a point where they could no longer background their gay identity and drawing on a liberal humanist discourse offered a framework to foreground their gay identity (Kitzinger, 1987). This position challenges many of the models (e.g. Cass, 1979; Brady and Busse, 1994; Markowe, 2002) that set out a sequential process where an individual moves from being confused about their identity to acceptance and being 'out'. Accounts from previously (heterosexually) married fathers confirm that fathers become increasingly accepting of their gay identity, but in a private capacity, and their ability to foreground a gay identity is mediated by familial and social institutions. The models construct coming out as an individualistic process, with a high level of introspection at each stage and when this is resolved the individual moves to the next stage. However, foregrounding a gay identity is not only about self-identity but about negotiating the expectations of others and these are culturally bound and laden with stereotypes. This socio-cultural positioning moderates what it means to be gay and a father and it is questionable if models can fully account for the construction of a non-heterosexual identity in an environment dominated by heteronormative discourses.

Accounts by fathers confirm that they all identified as gay although in early adult life there was no space to do so as it was regulated by heteronormative discourses. This heterosexual privilege led to them backgrounding their gay identity, often for many years, before they felt able to take up a subject position as a gay man. Reaching a point where fathers privately identified as gay did not always involve contact with the gay community, as suggested by the models. The act of accepting a gay identity privately, was significant for participants, who identified as gay in a socio-cultural context that was hostile towards homosexuality. However, they reached the position of being clear, no-matter

what the consequences, the only option was to foreground a gay identity. They could no longer manage the position of identifying publicly as 'straight' and having to background their gay identity as this self-regulation was impacting on their well-being (Tornello and Patterson, 2012). Even though there may be consequences they had a right to express autonomy and identify as gay. Consideration of these factors suggests that the models, whilst providing a useful starting point to understand how an individual identifies as gay, cannot adequately account for how coming out is impacted by socio-cultural factors, and the binary approach to being either 'in' or 'out' and this reinforces heteronormative privilege as it is only those who identify as gay that are expected to come out and foreground their sexual identity as a revelatory news item (Kitzinger, 2000).

Participants' accounts confirm that the initial revelation of their gay identity to family members was often met with disdain and a lack of acceptance by their wife and parents. This was not surprising as the repositioning of their identity had implications for family relationships. The response from family members included requests to keep their gay identity private and not understanding why, if they had 'hidden' it so long, they could not go on with their assumed straight identity. Others saw a gay identity as being synonymous with a sexual relationship with another man or men. However, fathers positioned a gay identity as being an intrinsic part of accepting their multiple identities that made them the person they are. Fathers had drawn on a liberal humanist discourse to foreground their gay identity and coming out was seen as revelatory act that impacted on the family rather than a mundane act with little consequence (Kitzinger, 2000). This positions sexual identity as being an intrinsic part of self and being constructed with equal worth as a heterosexual identity. It is not just about a sexual relationship with another man but about an emotional and social as well as sexual bond.

Being able to identify as a gay man was located as a legitimate requirement for participants to be themselves and feel a completeness as a person – a right for personal autonomy and for equal worth as those who identify as straight (Kitzinger, 1987; Clark, 2012). This confirms that coming out is far more than a 'choice'. Participants could potentially have maintained their marriage and had a relationship with other men. However, the accounts confirm that their backgrounded identity as a gay man was a part of their sense-of-self, and the right to integrate their sexual identity and achieve personal autonomy they needed to identify publicly as gay and have the opportunity to pursue an emotional, social and sexual relationship with another man (Kitzinger, 1987). This integration of sexual identity with one's self-identity is supportive of the models, however, the management of this, with often conflicting self-management, familial, social and cultural demands, emphasises the act of identity management as being as relevant for foregrounding a gay sexual identity.

7.3.2 Challenging heteronormativity: being a gay man and father

Dominant heteronormative discourses continue to make it necessary for an individual, who does not identify as straight, to have to come out if they want to be open about their sexual identity. This is reinforced by a variety of models that define coming out as an event that is completed and the completion moves individuals from being 'in' to 'out' - moving from one side of the binary to the other. Fathers made a decision not to publicly identify as gay before entering marriage and fatherhood. However this did not mean they did not identify as gay. Privately they identified as gay, or at least were clearly attracted to other men. Although homosexuality was decriminalised in 1967, prosecutions of gay men continued (Bedell, 2007; Fish, 2007); unequal treatment of gay men continued (e.g. age of consent, lack of recognition of gay partnerships) and; the emergence of AIDS (Harden, 2012) all contributed to the on-going marginalisation of gay men. This negative socio-political environment and lack of visibility of a gay culture, were key reasons cited by participants for

backgrounding their gay identity. Parents of participants, other family members, friends and the wider community all reinforced dominant heteronormative social and cultural identity expectations position a homosexual identity as wrong and immoral (Foucault, 1982; Parker, 2013). Participants also expressed a clear desire to father children and being a father and identifying as gay were seen as contradictory positions. These factors all contributed to fathers displaying self-management to keep their homosexual identity private and this questions a simple binary notion of being 'in' or 'out'.

Cass' (1979) defines coming out using a stage model, with the expectation that an individual would pass through each stage and reach the point where a gay identity was fully integrated with an individual's sense-of-self. This supports the notion of moving from being 'in' to 'out' to claim a gay identity. Brady and Busse (1994) presented a simplified version of Cass' (1979) model. However, this model still identified resolution as moving from 'in' to 'out', and, similar to Cass and other models, made little mention of the impact of socio-historical contexts (Giertsen and Anderssen, 2007). These models generally assume that identifying as gay occurs in adolescent years (Dube, 2000; King and Smith, 2004), which is not the case for previously married fathers who identify as gay. Gay fathers in this study identified the problematic nature of the in-out binary in terms of describing sexual identity (gay – straight). Participants described the complexity of managing their sexual identity and how heteronormative expectations constructed identifying as 'straight' as acceptable and offered authenticity to their subject position as a father. Although they did not publicly identify as gay, privately they did. Coming out models do not reflect this on-going negotiation. A key finding from the study is that fathers engaged in a complex practice of self-management and how this was influenced by personal, familial, socio-cultural and political institutions. For participants framing sexual identity as being as simple as being 'in' or 'out' is too simplistic. An array of factors impact on how gay fathers manage their self-identity. Accounts from this study confirm that

identifying as gay is a complex process rather than a short time bound event. Later foregrounding of a gay identity, as is the case with participants in this study, makes it more likely that men will have had heterosexual relationships and be fathers and heteronormative discourses associated with these positions complicate the process of coming out in a way not addressed by models.

Giertsen (1989) and Markowe (1996 and 2002) devised models that acknowledge identity prior to disclosure of a gay sexual identity. However, none of the models that account for claiming a public gay identity take ample account of the impact of socio-historical factors and how these continue to impact on men who privately identify as gay (Giertsen and Anderssen, 2007). Participants provided in-depth accounts of regulated spaces and moral positions that prevented them from foregrounding a gay identity. These included the negative social locating of homosexuality historically (particularly up to the 1980s); lack of any visible gay culture (up to the 1980s), particularly in rural areas; the attitudes of parents, family and friends; the lack of positive role-models among peers, in the local community or in the media; the emergence of AIDS, which was initially positioned as a 'gay plague' (Shilts, 1987). A key finding to emerge from participants was not that this stopped them foregrounding a gay identity as there was no available space to take up a position as a gay man. This confirms that the decision to come out was mediated by other people, heteronormative social institutions, the cultural context and wider socio-political context (Baxter, 2003).

Alderson (2003) emphasises that constructing a gay identity is impacted by both internal and external factors. This model differs from others as it considers ecological impact in developing a salient identity that emphasises external factors. The accounts of previously (heterosexually) married gay fathers confirm that the act of coming out was not their most difficult challenge. The most difficult challenge was the act of 'staying-in' – keeping their gay identity private. Participants often managed their assumed straight identity over long time periods. The dominant construction of heterosexuality led to them forming

heterosexual relationships and this led on to marriage and parenting (Plummer, 1995). The heteronormative constructions that are dominant in many parts of society are responsible for privileging heterosexuality over homosexuality. Gay fathers' accounts construct these as the factors that stopped them foregrounding an identity as a gay man during adolescent years or early adulthood. This created specific challenges for gay fathers as heteronormative expectations, the lack of any visible gay-scene and homophobia, which saw non-heterosexual positions as wrong and immoral, led to them forming a heterosexual relationship. The outcome of this for participants was marriage and positions as a husband and father and to be legitimate in these positions required self-regulation of homosexual identities and practices. This positions a non-heterosexual identity as being far more than individual choice – it is about managing culturally-bound positions that are constructed in a heterosexually dominant society. Consequently, the process of coming out was often protracted over a number of years, rather than a short term one-off event. This confirms the significance of ecological factors in the formation of a non-heterosexual identity at a micro, meso and macro system level (Alderson, 2003; Zea, and Nakamura, 2014).

The accounts from participants confirm the importance of interacting factors between the immediate family, local community and broader society in developing a salient gay identity. The dominance of heteronormative expectations make it necessary for individuals to come out. Those who identify as straight do not have to negotiate this, because society privileges and legitimises heterosexuality (Langdrige, 2008). Therefore individuals who identify as straight do not have to account for their sexual identity, whereas individuals who identify as homosexual do. Kitzinger (2000) explains that an approach to manage this is utilising mundane coming out, where information is portrayed as an aside, where it is almost unnoticed and avoids attention be drawn by others. However, for gay fathers heteronormative accountability is more evident and by

coming out they are seen as challenging the expectations of masculinity, heterosexual marriage and parenting, which problematises a gay identity. Accounts from participants play down their gay identity and they put forward arguments to account for this, such as they were the same person and still able to be a good father. However, the very expectations that make it necessary for an individual to come out, are the same expectations that make it likely that an individual who identifies as gay, will never be able to see themselves as 'completely out' and will have to manage this throughout their life. Therefore, coming out needs reframing – it needs to be seen as a negotiation that requires active on-going and sustained management – rather than a one-off event or short-term act. Participants in this study, refer to the process as requiring on-going management, with many turns and challenges and this problematises a gay identity and makes it unlikely fathers will be able to utilise mundane forms of coming out (Kitzinger, 2000). To reflect this a more accurate way of theorising coming out would be 'managing being out' rather than coming out and this is particularly relevant to gay fathers.

7.3.3 Managing family tensions: Coming out *and re-inscribing heteronormativity*

Coming out is an act that the individual who identifies as gay has to initially negotiate independently of others. However, for previously (heterosexually) married men the action of coming out disrupts family life and places an expectation on all to account for a having a family member who identifies as gay. Disclosure of a gay identity can be seen as problematic when it occurs after becoming a parent, which supports research by Power (2012). Disclosure of a non-heterosexual identity as a parent disrupts the dominant heteronormative notions of parenting. These expectations, which are informed by hegemonic masculinity, position fathers as the strong family-head, provider and protector of their children (and wife) and identifying as gay is seen to violate this position (Weeks, 2012). This is confirmed by participants who account for identifying as

gay to their children as the most difficult part of foregrounding a gay identity. Identifying as a gay father also brings a requirement for all members of the family to manage their family identities. For gay fathers there are challenges in managing their subject positions as a gay man and father. It can require (re)negotiation of living arrangements (as disclosure signalled a change in their relationship with their wife and this often impacts on where fathers live); a change in access to children (i.e. through part-time access if children spend time in different households with each parent) and a change in socialisation arrangements (i.e. a split in parents' relationship can require the realignment of family socialisation). Coming out has to be managed by all family members, which is not adequately addressed by the models, which focus almost entirely on the individual identifying as gay.

Bozett (1980) outlines three reasons for fathers not disclosing their gay identity: fear of rejection; shame about a homosexual identity; and fear of reprisals from their ex-wife. Accounts from fathers did not report overt concern about fear of reprisals from their ex-wife in stopping their disclosure, potentially as they had moved to foregrounding a gay identity over a number of years and did not see the contradictory nature of this to being married as problematic. However, accounts from fathers added to the work of Bozett (1980) as participants confirmed they were concerned about disclosure because of fear of rejection from their children. To minimise the potential for rejection fathers accounted for how they often delayed their coming out because they wanted to avoid jeopardising the relationship with their children. However, when they did disclose, participants reported challenges to their relationship with their children, but there were no accounts of children actually rejecting their father.

Barrett and Tasker (2001) suggested that fathers may be more cautious about disclosure to their sons, as it could be seen by them, as threatening to their gender identity and masculinity. Whereas, daughters are not impacted in the same way by hegemonic masculinity and may react more sympathetically.

However, in this study fathers reported, without exception, sons reacting more positively. Where there was a negative response, this came from daughters and this was linked to them expressing concern for their mother and the impact that the disclosure would have on them in terms of ending their marriage and their mother having to manage this. Where concern was expressed this was about how others outside the family would react to knowing their father was gay. The majority of research involving children with gay fathers has looked for deficits due to having a non-homosexual parent (e.g. Golombok and Tasker, 1996; Patterson, 1997; Anderssen, Amlie and Ytterøy, 2002; Crouch, 2012), but not at how children have to manage the process of coming out when their father identifies as gay. Clearly further research in this area, exploring the process of coming out for children with previously married gay fathers, would help to understand this phenomenon better.

For fathers who identify as gay after a heterosexual marriage and parenting, managing repositioned identities and relationships is a challenge. Previous research has searched for impacted developmental outcomes for children from having a gay parent. Participants did not identify challenges to development linked to their foregrounded gay identity, which is perhaps not surprising. However, they did state that challenges arise due to heteronormative expectations of family life and how these make children accountable for being part of a gay family as they are part of the process of managing being out and potential social consequences of this. This supports findings by Wishik and Pierce (1995) and Hanssen (2007 and 2012) who equated non-heterosexual identities in families as being associated with negative social and economic consequences. To address this, dominant heteronormative constructions of families need to be challenged. Public space is constructed as heterosexual space and heterosexuality in these spaces is seen as unproblematic. Gay identities that enter these spaces are 'subtly policed' (Brickwell, 2000) and the study confirms this position. This is a specific issue for families where fathers move from

foregrounding a straight to foregrounding a gay identity as family members have to negotiate the repositioning to being part of the disempowered rather than the empowered group.

Being a father also impacts on how fathers 'manage being-out'. Levels of agency for gay fathers are mediated by the expectations and actions of family members, particularly their children. Prior to coming out, fathers contemplated how they would manage a gay identity, often over many years. When they finally made the decision to foreground a gay identity, they often expressed a desire to be completely open and unconcerned about who knew about their gay identity. Models construct the move from being 'in' to 'out' as unidirectional and reaching a point where it is concluded (e.g. Cass, 1979; Brady and Busse, 1994; Markowe, 2002). However, this was not the case and varied for family members; over time, place and context. Fathers had to negotiate their level of outness in different situations with different family members. Their children felt more able to be 'out' in some situations and less so in others; other family members (e.g. parents of the father) felt unable or unwilling to disclose to extended family and this required negotiation of levels of 'outness'; (ex) wives often requested their husbands to avoid being 'out' in certain social situations. This confirms concerns about non-acceptance of, and hostility towards, fathers who identify as gay (Brinaman and Mitchell, 2008; Anderson, 2009). Even though homosexuality is more accepted legally, politically and socially (Chalabi, 2013), heteronormative families remain privileged and challenges to these constructions are strongly resisted as historically homosexuality is seen as threatening to the nuclear family and this argument continues to marginalise gay families (Kitzinger, 2007; Ellis, 2007) .

Wright and Perry (2006) and Greene and Britton (2012), refer to feelings of shame and internalised homophobia that can impact on those who identify as gay. Findings from this study confirm this. However, they suggest negative feelings towards homosexuality are present in other family members, not just

the person who identifies as gay. This may not be surprising for older members of fathers' families, as they were often positioned as contributing to the decision, years earlier, for fathers not identifying publicly as gay in early adulthood. However, for children, who have been brought up when attitudes to homosexuality have been more positive and visibility of a gay culture more prevalent, participants identify shame and internalised homophobia. It confirms that positive political and legal changes do not necessarily equate with more positive universal social attitudes to homosexuality, particularly when it is one's own father who identifies as gay. Clearly having a gay father challenges many of the dominant constructions of families and family members are made accountable for this by heterosexist societal assumptions. This further supports the need to re-frame the process of coming out to being more about 'managing being-out' and as a process that requires all members of the family to negotiate.

For participants their gay identity is just part of them and taking a mundane approach to being out would offer fathers a way to manage their position as a gay man alongside their other subject positions. However, there is a tension as for family members having a person, who was previously assumed to be straight, challenges heteronormative assumptions and this removes a safe space to come out using mundane approaches and problematises coming out in everyday situations, which expands on Kitzinger's (2000) work on mundane forms of coming out. Accounts of managing being out construct a continual tension between fathers wanting to foreground a gay identity and other family members wanting to background their gay identity and this has to be managed repeatedly in social situations where mundane heterosexism is created by heterosexual privilege and generally remains unchallenged. Support to 'manage being out' and negotiate practices to resist heteronormative expectations from social interactions and institutions would clearly be beneficial to family members.

Heterosexist constructions of parenting and family can lead children, who have a gay father, to manage this by censoring their family to others to 'hide' the gay

identity and this devalues, excludes and segregates their families from heterosexually parented families. They see themselves as inferior to other families and as well as the external pressures this brings, can lead to conflict within the family, as it leads to expectations for their father to background his gay identity in interactions with others outside the family to protect them from being accountable for violating heteronormative expectations. This is further confirmation that fathers foregrounding a gay identity requires 'managing being-out' by all members of the family. There are no explicit reports of homophobia towards fathers or family from outside the family in accounts from participants, however, the fear of being 'exposed' is clearly evident. This confirms the power of heteronormative norms that see heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity as superior, as described by Edley (2001b) and Alexander (2011). These norms make families that deviate from dominant expectations, namely being 'straight', accountable for the construction of their family.

Historically explicit homophobia was far more evident in past years and this impacted on how those who identified as gay managed their sexual identity (Wright and Perry, 2006; Hsu and McCormack, 2012). However, Brickwell (2000) argued that subtle policing occurs when gay identities enter heterosexual spaces. This study confirms this, but also shows that this 'policing' is complex as it is constructed by those who are marginalised, as well as those whose identities are privileged. This is further complicated as these are not explicit actions carried out by individuals to exclude marginalised groups, but implicit positions created and maintained by the dominance of heterosexual norms. To enable gay-parented families to see themselves as equal to other families, these heteronormative assumptions of parenting and family need to be challenged, which is supported by liberal humanism, which aims to minimise difference between gay and straight people (Kitzinger, 1987).

As the number of men who are gay and are parents increases, this contributes to the varied constructions of families. However, gay fathers continue to be judged

against the dominant construction of family, namely a mother and father who identify as straight. There is virtually no public recognition of gay-parented families, for example in television programmes or children's story books. This places an expectation on all members of the family to manage their family construction, which is positioned in a heteronormative socio-cultural context. Heteronormative assumptions impact on individuals. Identifying as gay following heterosexual marriage and having children, challenges these assumptions, and family members become accountable for managing the impact of this. Over a number of decades research has explored gay parenting and the impact this has on children in terms of parenting behaviour, children's gender development and the later sexual orientation of children (Green, 1978; Perrin, 2002; Robinson and Brewster, 2013). The evidence to emerge from this research agenda has failed to find specific negative impacts on children's development specifically linked to having a gay parent (American Sociological Association, 2013). A research agenda that is focused on identifying deficits serves to confirm gay families as different and problematise them. Families with a gay parent need support to manage their difference in the context of dominant heteronormative discourse. This study confirms gay-parented families need to be seen as valid and valued in the same way heterosexually-parented families are.

7.4 Evaluation of theory and method

This study makes a significant contribution to understanding how men who are fathers, were (heterosexually) married and identify as gay in later life, 'manage being-out'. The study draws on theoretical models that describe coming out as an event with a beginning and end. While these models have some relevance, they culminate in a one-off monumental event of self-disclosure. In contrast, the accounts of coming out provided by participants differ from the models that suggest coming out is more about an event that is completed rather than being on-going. Rather than a completed event identifying publicly as gay requires 'managing being-out' on an on-going basis as it creates potential discomfort as it

challenges the dominant heteronormative assumptions. Fathers who identify as gay have to 'manage being-out' on an on-going basis. This study confirms the models do not reflect the on-going nature of this process identifying as gay. Models suggest a sequential, broadly linear approach. Whereas participant accounts construct this as a dynamic process that involves on-going negotiation and management and socio-historical and cultural factors impact on when and how fathers foreground their gay identity and when there is a space to do so. A gay identity is far more than a sexual identity. It is a core part of and not being able to claim a gay identity positions gay men as different and inferior to straight men and this heteronormative privileging continues to regulate what practices as a father and family member.

These points challenge the essentialist frameworks portrayed by the models. Although essentialism is not the same as biological determinism the public and political discourse that can emerge from this can support a hegemonic agenda (Bohan, 1993). While there have been advances in how homosexuality is positioned, the models, based on essentialist assumptions, construct the act of identifying publicly as gay in this context. However, the accounts clearly show that this is not the case. A rigid essentialist approach to foregrounding a gay identity does not take account of the management and accountably an individual has to negotiate in their socio-political environment. More positive social institutions and spaces to homosexuality does not automatically allow an individual to follow the sequential stages outlined in the models and identify as gay. The accounts confirm that for an older man who is a father, while the world is broadly more positive to homosexuality (but with dominant heteronormative family expectations), their identity continues to be impacted by historical, social and cultural factors that the models simply do not account for.

This study used a Foucauldian methodological framework to explore how previously heterosexually married fathers managed the foregrounding of a gay identity. This approach successfully challenged the deficit approach that has

dominated research with gay-parent families over a number of decades. The in-depth interviews conducted with participants gave space for fathers to provide detailed accounts of how they managed subject positions as a gay man, father and family member. While a semi-structured approach to interviews was used, this left ample scope for participants to direct the interview to develop as they wished and this approach was valued by the participants. Colbourne and Sque (2005), reported that this approach to interviewing could have therapeutic benefits. The approach was supported by providing time for participants to allow accounts to be gathered that enabled an in-depth exploration of how subjects managed the foregrounding of a gay identity in their social world, which would not be possible using a positivist approach (Hegarty, 2007; Clarke et al., 2010). This offered validation of their repositioned identity and feedback from participants following the interviews confirmed they had found the opportunity for their 'story' of foregrounding their gay identity to be heard in a non-pathologising way empowering (Plummer, 1985; Clarke and Peel, 2007). The methodological approach, drawing on Foucauldian approaches, enabled exploration of how participants managed dilemmas and how these were impacted by historically situated knowledge (Weeks, 2012).

Participants provided in-depth accounts of aligning their private and public identities to be able to foreground their gay identity. Although this study contributes to how fathers 'manage being-out', it is limited in not being able to provide first-hand accounts from children and other family members. The accounts clearly confirm that while fathers initially come out, they and all members of the family subsequently have to 'manage being-out' and this negotiation was ongoing and there was no indication of it being completed. There is a place for quantitative studies, however, the approach used in the current study aimed to empower a marginalised group by allowing their voice to be clearly heard and in a way that did not automatically problematise their

family because of the father's sexual identity (Richardson, 1981; Clarke and Peel, 2007c).

7.5 Implications and future research directions

This study makes a contribution to understanding how gay fathers, who were previously heterosexually married, foreground their gay identity and how coming out is managed by family members, including their children. The importance of the key findings (discussed in section 7.3) are further emphasised by the scarcity of research in this area. This study has identified that 'managing being-out' has to be negotiated by all members of the family as family spaces are governed by heteronormative expectations, which continue to privilege heterosexual subject positions. To achieve equality there needs to be space for homosexual subject positions. This has significance as it provides a basis to start to challenge the heteronormative construction of parenting and families. This is not about dismissing heterosexually-parented families but raising awareness that gay men can and do occupy a subject position as a father. The accountability that gay-fathers and their children are regulated by are mainly derived from outside their immediate family and are constructed by dominant heteronormative discourses, rather than being derived from deficits, because of the sexual identity of their father. To begin to address this requires:

- Raised awareness that some fathers identify as gay and acknowledgement of this so that discourses on families are not entirely dominated by heteronormative ideals and expectations.
- Acknowledgment that children may have a gay father and to allow space for this to be acknowledged if children choose to do so.
- Reframe coming out as an on-going process, rather than a one-time monumental event, that requires on-going management and negotiation
- Acknowledge that the requirement to foreground a gay identity is created by dominant heteronormative privilege assuming that individuals are straight unless it is announced otherwise.

- The on-going nature of coming out and the implications for family members. Gay fathers may want to convey coming out as mundane, as information rather than a news item, however the everyday situations of this context do not provide insulation from shock value. Awareness of this for previously married fathers who later foreground a gay identity may assist how they manage the on-going process of coming out.
- The need to challenge heteronormative assumptions of families so that there is space for families who do not fit the dominant norm to be visible.
- This study challenges the deficit approach to research with gay-father families and emphasises the importance of research that aims to understand how fathers manage their gay sexual identity and parenting identity. Research informed by LGBTQ psychology has potential to challenge heteronormativity by gaining an in-depth understanding of how subjects are impacted by power from social institutions and utilising outcomes to promote inclusion.
- Education, social care and health services need to acknowledge the position of gay-parented families and see them as legitimate, alongside other families.
- Dominant constructions of family need to be challenged so society acknowledges and values the presence of gay-fathers sees their practices as a family as being legitimate and morally acceptable
- Gay fathers and their children need to be empowered to claim a position in public spaces that are dominated by heterosexual families.

Future studies need to consider the approach to men who identify as gay. It is an identity that has to be managed on an on-going basis and taking up a position as gay applies, albeit differently, to all members of the family. Research is needed to investigate this phenomenon. There also continues to be a dearth of evidence to understand how families, who have a gay parent, manage their identities and

interactions within social institutions, such as family, education and health services.

The current study collected data retrospectively. There are advantages to this as it allowed fathers to provide accounts that focused on how socio-historical and cultural factors privileged heterosexual subject positions and delayed them achieving a salient public identity. However, collecting data as participants manage and negotiate their identities would also have advantages. Kitzinger (2000) emphasises the benefit of naturally occurring data and there is clearly potential for this to understand coming out in context, particularly in environments that may be less (psychologically) safe, although there are implications for research design and ethical considerations. To capture recorded data of naturally occurring acts of coming out to wives and children from (previously) heterosexually married men would be virtually impossible. However, an in-depth study of how all members of a family 'manage being-out' would have the benefit of understanding how accountability for practices as a family are managed by all members of the family and how this is negotiated in social interactions within and outside the family.

To build on this study further research is needed to understand how gay fathers and their families manage their practices as a family in the context of heteronormative social institutions. Specifically future research needs to explore:

- How children, who have a father who identifies as gay, manage 'being out'.
- How family members (e.g. parents, brothers, sisters etc.) manage the (re)positioning of their family after a previously heterosexually married father identifies as gay.
- How to avoid pathologising homosexuality and utilise inclusive approaches, as advocated by LGBTQ psychology, to understand how families manage their identities and practices.

- How men who identify as gay in later life manage the process of being out and how this can add to theoretical understanding.
- Establish approaches to promote social inclusion of gay- fathered families alongside other families.
- Exploration of how heterosexism marginalises gay-parented families.
- How social institutions create exclusions for families with individuals who identify as gay and strategies to promote inclusion.

7.6 Reflexivity: the researcher and research process

This study was influenced by professional experiences, an academic interest in LGBTQ psychology and my position as a gay man. Working in the National Health Service (NHS) and education, dominant discourses of families – heterosexual and with different sex parents, were frequently assumed. A review of the literature also identified very limited research focused on previously married fathers who subsequently foregrounded a gay identity. Griffiths (2011) stresses that researchers have a sense of self and this makes them embodied and embedded in the research. There is on-going debate about the position of researchers and how this may support access to participants. My position in relation to the study is relevant and I considered this carefully in the research process. I was clear that I wanted potential participants to know my perspective in the research.

Clough and Nutbrown (2012) see positionality as being influenced by social, moral and political positions and practices. For this reason I made the decision to tell potential participants that I identified as a gay man and was not a parent. Mercer (2007) argues that being an insider can be a double-edged sword as it can distort the boundaries between research and group identity but can also promote understanding and insight of the research phenomena. On reflection the decision to disclose my gay identity assisted building a rapport with participants as they saw this as providing me within insight of the coming out process and this created trust and gave participants confidence to share intimate

and private details about their experiences identifying as gay. Respondents often drew on this in their accounts and saw me as understanding of their positions (e.g. you know what it is like when you are not accepted; things have changed so much in terms of accepting gay men, haven't they). On reflection this had a positive impact on interviews as participants appeared at ease with discussing sensitive issues related to their gay identity. Being a gay man conducting research with gay men was therefore a positive experience and led to trusted research relationships, which may have been more difficult if this disclosure was not made (Colbourne and Sque, 2005; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Participants were aware that I was not a parent but did know I was a qualified teacher. No reference was made to not being a parent by participants, which suggested this was not seen as problematic.

Researchers need to be self-conscious of the social, moral and political values they bring to research. Although recruitment of participants was challenging, as is often the case when researching hard to reach groups (Penrod et al., 2003), identifying as part of the broad group I had awareness of where to focus recruitment efforts and appropriate forums to seek participants, which assisted the process. In the early stages of planning the intention had been to include children as part of the research process. Due to difficulties in accessing participants and broad geographical locations this was altered as it would not have allowed enough time to involve children in an appropriate way (as an additional 2-3 research meetings would have been required). Although involving children would have been beneficial in accessing an under researched group, particularly using qualitative approaches to understand meaning making, research studies have to be balanced with ethical commitment to participants. I was not assured of being able to act ethically in providing the required time to make participation meaningful the decision not to include children before commencing data collection was appropriate. Interviews with fathers covered a broad range of topics but they also allowed space for participants to expand and

offer new topics and this was important as the accounts accurately reflected choices made by participants. The research method used for the study allowed an affirmative approach to be taken to challenge heteronormative assumptions.

The process of reflection requires the researcher to question their contribution and objectivity of knowledge (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Drawing on a Foucauldian framework was at the heart of inquiry and this focused the study on historical and political as well as socio-cultural influences. This was relevant given the age and social experiences of participants. Space was provided in interviews for silence as questions prompted reflection on disciplinary power and how this had impacted on participants by allowing some practices (e.g. heterosexual) to become normalised and the accountability this placed on them for challenging heteronormative discourses (Foucault, 1977; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). Data was analysed using a rigorous process and drawing on a theoretical framework to avoid bias as far as is possible. In qualitative research it is not possible for the researcher to remain outside of the process as it involves an interpretation of interpretation. However, ongoing self-questioning during the process and responding to feedback allowed an objective approach to be. Knowledge from the project has built on previous work (e.g. Cass, 1979, Bozett, 1980, Kitzinger, 2000) to understand how fathers and families make sense of the process of coming out in a heteronormative context. As well as making a contribution to academic knowledge the findings of the research have relevance to gay men who are fathers about coming out as a process.

7.7 Conclusion

The intention of this study was to build on the limited previous research evidence focused on gay fathers. In addition, much previous research has been conducted using a methodological framework that either pathologised a homosexual identity, or, set-out to establish deficits children may have based on having a gay parent. An over-arching aim of this study was to challenge these problematising agendas and conduct qualitative research with gay fathers. The

research focused on a particular subset of fathers who were previously heterosexually married, and explored how fathers managed the foregrounding of their gay identity within changing expectations of masculinity and fatherhood. Even though the social construction of masculinity and fathering is dynamic, the analysis shows that they are still laden by hegemonic masculinity and heteronormative expectations. Identifying as a gay father challenges these expectations and makes fathers accountable for their sexual identity. This accountability has to be negotiated in an almost exclusively heteronormative environment. This study, drawing on approaches to promote inclusion of sexual minority groups as advocated by LGBT psychology, valued each individual as equal as a parent, and made no judgments about the impact of their sexual identity on their ability to parent. This was underpinned by a Foucauldian framework to analyse how subject positions (e.g. sexual identity, father and family) and regulated and governed broadly through social institutions and self-regulation in heteronormative contexts.

Overall, the study explored how sexual identity is influenced by historical contexts and how fathers managed their identity to foreground and justify a gay identity. The study also explored how families, where the father was previously (heterosexually) married and now identified as gay, re-negotiated their family identities. The analysis demonstrated that identifying as gay, which is commonly referred to as coming out, in no way captures the complexity of the process *as a family event*. Foregrounding a gay identity involves on-going management of the expectations of others. All members of the family become accountable for fathers identifying as gay, as this is seen as violating the dominant expectations of fathers and families - being 'straight', strong, provider and protector. While sexuality is part of one's identity, foregrounding a gay identity for fathers brings challenges for all members of the family. To manage these heteronormative expectations, families have to engage in complex negotiation, both within and outside the family; to manage being a gay family in heteronormatively regulated

spaces. This creates an on-going tension between fathers' drawing on a liberal humanist discourse to be autonomous and foreground their gay identity and being constrained by children and other family members who are governed and accountable to heteronormative discourse.

Overall, the study challenges the conceptualisation of coming out portrayed in the literature. The dominant notion of coming out portrayed by models doesn't adequately reflect the complexity of the process. It cannot be seen as a one-time monumental event that is completed because those who identify as gay live in a heterosexist world with heteronormative expectations. These expectations are particularly ingrained in the social institutions, parenting and families. The act of coming out, more accurately needs to be seen as *managing being-out* and this has to be negotiated on an on-going basis. In addition, *managing being-out* is not confined to the individual who identifies as gay, but to all members of the family. The requirement for families who have a gay father to engage in this action are constructed by socio-historical and cultural positions that have, and continue to, privilege heterosexual identities. Undoubtedly the socio-political and legal climate towards homosexuality is more positive in the United Kingdom than it has ever been but the expectation for families to account for having a parent with a non-heterosexual identity remains as strong as ever. Challenging the dominant heteronormative construction of families and seeing all families as legitimate, where all sexual identities are considered equal and coming out is no longer required, is still some way off.

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APPENDICES

- A Ethical approval confirmation
- B Recruitment Advert
- C Additional project information
- D Consent form
- E First interview schedule
- F Follow-up interview schedule
- G Sample section of an interview transcript

Appendix A: Ethical approval confirmation

29 June 2007

Damien Fitzgerald
Development and Society
36 College House
Sheffield Hallam University
Collegiate Crescent
Sheffield
S10 2BP

Dear Damien

I am pleased to report that your proposed research of *The Experiences of Gay Fathers & Their Children*, with the minimum age of the children being involved in the research being revised to 7, has now been approved by the ACES Faculty Board Ethics Sub-Committee.

Yours sincerely

Jill McKenna
Faculty of ACES, Diversity, Ethics, & Widening Participation Co-ordinator
Ext. 3225
g.mckenna@shu.ac.uk
Room 4107 Sheaf Building
Sheffield Hallam University
S1 1WB

Appendix B: Recruitment Advert

CALLING GAY FATHERS

Are you a father who happens to be gay?

Would you be willing to take part in a research project involving 2-3 short meetings?

Would your child(ren) be prepared to complete some activities about day-to-day life?*

As part of my PhD research project I am wanting to speak to families headed by gay fathers.

For more information contact me by telephone (xxxx xxx xxxx); email (d.fitzgerald@shu.ac.uk) or see [Project Overview](#)



Sheffield Hallam University

*When the decision was made not to include children an amended version of the advert was produced to reflect this.

Appendix C: Additional project information

Dear

The points below provide more detailed information and set out what I am asking of each family.

Thank you for expressing interest in my research project. As stated in the information my research is aiming to explore the experiences of gay fathers as there is very little research that has done this. This is an important area for research as people need to understand the diversity within families. Services, such as schools, health and childcare provision also need to be aware of this so they are open and responsive to this diversity when providing services. To help increase awareness I would like to talk to you about your decision to become a parent, your experiences as a parent, how you feel this has impacted on you and how you feel you have been supported by family, friends and others.

So what time commitment will be required?

This would involve two meetings. The first meeting would be the two of us to conduct the first interview. This would include a discussion around your experience of becoming a parent and fatherhood. The second meeting, again would be the two of us, to conduct the second interview. This interview is likely to: pick up points you discussed in the first interview; discuss how you feel supported as a family; interactions with other family members; your children's perspective of their family; reactions from the broader community, work environment or the gay community on being a gay father and; other points you would like to raise.

Where will the meetings take place?

The meetings with you can take place at a location that is suitable and convenient to you. This can be in a public place but I am aware of the need for a private and quiet environment. We can discuss this and arrange a suitable location.

I hope this has provided an overview of the project and look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes

Damien

Appendix D: Consent form

Please read each of the statements carefully and if you are in agreement tick each of the boxes:

1. The purpose of the project has been explained to me and I am aware that any questions from participants will be answered in an open and honest way

2. I am aware of the time commitment that is likely to be involved

3. It has been explained to me that the information I provide will be stored securely and pseudonyms will be used when the data is written up in the thesis. Where possible other details will be altered (e.g. region, occupations) to maintain anonymity as far as possible. But I am aware that it may be possible for people close to me to recognise aspects of the write up based on awareness of me they already have

4. I am aware how information I provide will be used in the final thesis. Aspects of this information may also be used in publications and at conferences but it will be used in a style that respects my anonymity as detailed above

5. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time and I can request any data I have provided to be destroyed. In addition I can withhold any information that I do not wish to share with the researcher

6. Before any data is used in the project I will have the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the information and give consent for it to be used

7. I have had an opportunity to ask questions or clarify information that has been given as part of the explanation of the project

Name.....

Signed.....

Date.....

Appendix E: First interview schedule

Statement read to each participant at the start of the interview:

The discussion will be recorded and later typed. On the typed version your name will be changed and once the project is completed the recording will be destroyed. You will be welcome to have a copy of the transcript. Data from the interview will be used for research and extracts may be included in research, but every caution will be taken to maintain your confidentiality. If I ask you anything during the interview that you would rather not talk about, please just let me know and I will move on. Are you happy for us to continue with the interview?

- Can you tell me about your family?
- Each of us may have a number of roles. How do you find your roles as a father and gay man fit together?
- Does being gay have an impact on your experiences as a parent?
- Do your children know you are gay?
- What made you decide (not) to tell them?

Where you surprised by the reaction of...

- Do you face any particular challenges as a gay father?
- Over time all families have positive and negative times: How does your family respond to the struggles of family life?

The triumphs of family life?

- What are the main sources of support for you and your children?

- Have you experienced any difficulties as a father because of your sexuality?
- Have your children experienced any difficulties because of being in a gay family?
- Is there anything else about being a parent that you can tell me?

Follow up statements:

- We were talking about.....
- How do you feel about....?
- What do you mean....?

Appendix F: Follow-up interview schedule

The second interview explored additional areas but also followed up on points made in the first interview. Specific questions were formulated, based on responses fathers provided in the first interview. The interview covered the following broad topics:

- What sorts of things do you do in your leisure time as a family?
- How do you find services, such as schools and health services, are towards you?
- Are you open with people outside the family about your sexuality? IF YES
- Have you had any reactions from people outside the family that have surprised you?
- How did you introduce your boyfriend to your child(ren)?
- Was it more or less difficult than you thought? The same or different for each of your children?
- Have you had any reactions from the gay community about being a father? More or less positive than you thought?
- Is your child open with people outside the family about your sexuality? IF YES
- Have your children had any reactions from outside the family that have surprised them?
- Can you tell me about your work environment? Has this altered since you came-out?

Appendix G: Sample transcript section

Sample section of interview transcript (Ralph) including initial analytic notes from early readings

Can I start of by asking you a bit about your family situation?

Well I am still legally married. My wife and children live in Stevenage, which is a few miles from here. In what is still our joint home, although to get this place I had to come out of the mortgage but that has all been sorted legally. My daughter Karen is 21 in December and my son Darren is 18. They live with Niamh, my wife, her partner and his son in the house and her mother moved in recently because she had a heart attack, so she has not been very well and they all live together in the house.

And you have a partner?

Yes, Gabriel. We have been together two years.

Right. Can I ask when you left the family home?

January 2002. I came out in August 2000 and I stayed there for a year and half but it was stressful. We felt we were treading water, neither could make any moves, we couldn't move on. But once I had done the coming out bit it was much easier. It was a bit like a phoney war though really. We expected something to happen but nothing did happen. And we stopped sharing the same bedroom pretty quickly I think. And it was kinda like weird really. To everybody outside we were the same but inside we were quite different and it felt too much like we were playing a role¹. So it was time to move out. Financially it was a bit of a shock, but that is another issue.

Yeah. In terms of you deciding to come out five years of so ago

Seven wasn't it. I came out in 2000?

Yes seven, sorry. At what point would you say that you identified as a gay man?

¹ Seems to suggest that even after coming out still had foreground heteronormative practices of living in heterosexual family for those outside the immediate family – heteronormative family discourse. And this would have been something that his wife and children, to at least some degree, would have had to do as well

Wow. Well I knew a very long, long time ago but I had a strong mother, a very strong family upbringing. I couldn't do anything about it at that point, it was something that didn't exist for me. It wasn't thinkable². In, well my mum died in 1986 and my dad died in 1997 and then Niamh's dad died in 2000 and I thought, God, all these people are going and I am still not even beginning to be me.³ So in some ways that was the sort of catalyst. I was getting more and more unhappy I would say. Erm, it was difficult to know what was going on really and there was nothing going on because Niamh and I were still getting on, just our relationship had changed. I was getting more and more unhappy I would have said. Certainly, I though clearly our relationship has changed. What happened then I don't know. I suppose 47, heading for the millennium, all those sorts of issues. In the end I thought I had to do, I just had no choice as I was going crazy⁴. Erm, it was really, really difficult because we had been married for 20 years, Karen was 14, Darren was 11. Kind of oldish, but not old enough to be independent. But despite all of those issues I had to do something about it. So in answer to your question I think I knew when I was very young, something inside me, but I didn't think it was possible, crazy but true!⁵

Yes, but times were different.

Yes and when I speak to Gabriel, because he is from Mexico and the situation there is even more. The situation there is better now but it is closeted. He has an Italian mother and it is one the reasons why he came out in this country. He had an Italian mother and those sort of things and that is one of the reasons that he came out in this country. He kinda looks at England as being a very open country and he sort of says I don't understand why these things happen, but these things do happen⁶. I

² No space to identify as gay – governed by heteronormative discourse

³ Some people may say why did people do it but it is clear from this response that he knew but felt he could not even consider the option of coming out – a difficult dilemma, be true to self and risk losing family or remain closeted.

⁴ Need to act autonomously – right to be self

⁵ Identified as gay when 'very young' although did not use word 'gay' but self-awareness

⁶ Gives a useful cultural context and shows clearly how different social groups are socially and culturally constructed.

suppose if I had thought about it very, very rationally then I could have done it. But at that point it wasn't an option for me. I didn't really believe it was an option.⁷

Just in terms of having children, had you always wanted to have children?

Erm, probably but that wasn't a deciding factor. I didn't make the decision based on that⁸. When I was younger my family life was quite difficult, there was no doubt about that. Erm, I did want to have children but I think if I had been able to be more me then that wouldn't have been a deciding factor in my decision. As it happened Niamh wasn't able to have children, so we adopted both of the children. We adopted Karen at six months, so they were both adopted from six months old.

So obviously that was a very conscious decision from both of you to have children?

Oh yes, we both wanted them, erm and I suppose then I was on my life line so to speak of. And I did, it was always there in the background then at 47 it jumped up and hit me like a ton of bricks⁹.

Do you know in terms of err, your wife, obviously it is a long time. But when you met, planning to have children, the years after that, did you have a good relationship?

We had a very good relationship, not a sexual relationship. It was kinda ok on that front to. But since I came out it is so different. I think she is much happier to now. When I did come out I think she was surprised in some ways but in others she wasn't. But that was (inaudible). We met a long, long time ago, when I was 19. We were at university together, we weren't actually at the same place, but we were in the same down. We had an on off relationship. Then I went to France for two years and when I came back we got in touch again. And she was going to move to Holland but instead of moving to Holland she moved to London. Then she was sort of on my doorstep. When I look back and we were talking, in some ways at that point the decision was sort of taken off me. In some ways it was. Not that I regretted it but

⁷ Reflecting back acknowledges could have done it but now looking at it in a different genealogical context – subject position as a gay man was not seen as available

⁸ Referring to reason for getting married

⁹ Referring to gay identity – had been backgrounded now foregrounded

when I think back I can see it was. When I think back I don't think she was being negative, but we got on so I suppose (inaudible)

Right, in terms of becoming a parent, how did that impact on you?

What having children you mean?

Yes, perhaps, how did it impact on you personally and socially...?

Well, the way it would impact on anybody I think. Your focus changes completely, your life is much more restricted, your money drops down completely. Because I teach I had the summer holidays off. For the first year Niamh was at home and then she went part-time. So for me I found I spent a lot of time with the children, perhaps more than other people would have done. At about 3 they went to nursery and she went back to work part-time. She did (inaudible) work, so often worked in the weekends or at weekends so I was on call. During the holidays I spent a lot of time with the children, almost to the point that after the six weeks I was glad to get back to school to have a rest sort of thing. I don't think my understanding of how having children is any different from anybody else to be honest¹⁰.

Right, thinking back to being a parent was there anything you found particularly different about being a parent then you had imagined? Anything particularly rewarding or challenging?

Erm, not sure actually. I suppose people looked at us in a different way. Kind of assumed we were more mature, more grown up and more sensible. Erm, it is all very rewarding to have 2 lovely kids. We get on very well, they know Gabriel and it is all very open. But having children is very rewarding. I suppose one of the hardest things is, you know having a tantrum in the supermarket. This was one of the things I couldn't bear if others (inaudible words) and now it is me! But I think you become much more patient, they saying having patients is a virtue. But I think I did become much more patient with different things.

Thinking about you now as a gay man and as a parent, do you think that being gay impacts on how you parent?

¹⁰ Almost said in a normalising way – did he think that I was trying to problematise him being a parent because he is gay? Does not see a link between sexual and parenting identities

Not at all.

Not at all?

The only difference it has is the fact that I am not living with them. Other than that physical separation, it is, at times I find that quite stressful, emotional. But I have got used to it, we have all got used to the situation.

In terms of emotional do you mean, when you have been there full-time...

Yes. And even now, we had been on holiday and yesterday we both went over and said hello to everybody, had a cup of coffee. But even now it is kinda weird to leave the house and them still to be there, a little bit still.¹¹

Do you know, when I said about being gay impacting on being a parent. I wasn't thinking in positive or negative terms, I am thinking in a sense. Just thinking about how you are yourself as a person. If I said for example as a gay man that is part of me and perhaps that does have an influence on some of the things I do. I was wondering in that sense.

Erm, I am not sure really. I think they have both grown up a little bit. I mean they were both incredibly accepting, which I suppose was my biggest fear. Erm, so from that point of view, but I suppose from my actions in what I would do, it hasn't changed what I would have done anyway¹². Erm I don't know whether it has had an impact, I am trying to think. I am not sure.

Right. Ok

I am not being helpful am I?

No it is fine. Can I ask you about telling your children?

Yes, it was quite hard. Darren has ADHD and has had it quite badly and they knew I was going to get my own room and was moving away. And Karen had been winding him up and had been saying that dad is leaving because you are so horrible. So in some ways for him it was relieve that it was the situation. But I did tell them both. I told them both separately. Karen was, they were both fine actually. Karen, it was sort of like a film. In their own way they didn't say that is great, but they were fine. They both accepted it. Then when I moved out I lived in a house in North London

¹¹ Separation from family home as a parent is still sometimes difficult

¹² Does not see identifying as gay as having an impact on his position as a parent

and they would come and stay over. As it happened it was a gay household and they would come and stay over and that wasn't a problem for them. What they didn't like was having to go somewhere else and what they didn't like was the stress of having to go somewhere else rather than being a gay person. Sometimes if Darren had had a late party somewhere he would come and stay and didn't find that a problem at all.

Did they react differently to your thought they would.

Well I had imagined the worst case scenario. Then I thought well how would I have reacted if my dad had told me this then I thought well that is ridiculous because it was unthinkable. But then I thought maybe they think it is unthinkable. I think they did react differently but I had no idea how they would act. I am just grateful, relieved that they acted as they did¹³. Because it was a risk or a gamble in some ways but it was a gamble and a risk that I had no choice but to take. I was going loopy and I think they also realised but they couldn't understand what was going on. So in some ways knowing what the reason is, is a relief because once you know what it is you can start focusing on it. So I think they felt it was a relief but I could be wrong. I found it an enormous relief.

In a sense you said that not telling was not an option.

No it was not.

Can I ask you in a sense, and I don't mean you should or shouldn't have told them.

What made you decide that you had to tell them, what was it?

I think I owed it to them really. They had been living with Niamh and that was very hard. It was over a year after I came out to Niamh that I told the children¹⁴. But I think they had a right to know really. They had a right to know why we were having problems. What was the point in hiding it?

Well I guess in a sense...

It was in inverted commas 'too late'

Yeah

¹³ Very concerned about how his children would react to him identifying as gay and then relieved as he saw their reaction as positive

¹⁴ A gap of one year between coming out to his wife and his children

It was also having gone through those years of hiding everything I had no more to hide from them.

Did you and Niamh talk together about telling the children? Was it something you agreed together?

We both agreed that I should tell the children but I did it on my own. We didn't go into the 'how are you going to tell them', I just told them really.

Do you know since you did tell them have they asked you questions?

No, not really, no. I know one of Karen's boyfriends was very homophobic¹⁵ and she was kinda wary. And now, I know her boyfriend but he and she don't come here. I think she finds it a bit of a stress. Because I think until it is absolutely clear that they are going to be together for a long term, there is no point really and I don't mind that really. It is absolutely fine¹⁶. And they know obviously that I am living here¹⁷, living away from home and that is sufficient. Darren hasn't really had any girlfriends as such, although he is 18, he is still quite young. Not retarded in any way, just not mature.

Right.

But I suspect and I wouldn't blame them really. You don't want to put all your washing on the line when you first meet someone, so you just do it gradually, slowly and take you time with these things¹⁸. I don't know what they would ask me really. I would certainly not ask my parents about anything, so...

¹⁵ Interesting that she is accepting of father but happy to go out with a man with what father described as 'very homophobic' views?

¹⁶ This would just never be an issue though with mother as she is straight.

Heteronormative dominance impacting on father relationship – assumptions of everybody is straight!

¹⁷ Referring to her boyfriend being aware her father is living away from home but does not know (and she does not want him to) that her father is living with his male partner. Her father's level of being out is censored by what his daughter wants others outside the family to know

¹⁸ This links though to what is seen as a potential problem – mother and step father is not – dad and boyfriend is.

In terms of, do you know after you came out and, sort of thinking about you and the children as a family unit. Do you think that you got support from people, because previously you had your wife and family around you, friends, neighbours and I guess people can offer support in different ways. Is that support still there? Has it changed? Do other people still support you? Has it changed?

Oh, it has changed, there is no question about that. Because then we were one type of family. Let's call it that. And there was no problems about neighbours, things like that. I suppose once the situation had changed, yes you don't go round shouting it from the rooftops. Yes they are still supportive, but they are supportive in a way then hark back to the previous situation¹⁹. I still know some people, Niamh and I started a dance group years ago and there are people who come to that, we still go together, not 'together, together' and I meet people there who I knew before hand and they know we are separated and that's all they need to know I think. They offer some kind of support but in terms of the more valuable support that I need it would come from other people. It would come from the gay dad group or people I know. Because I suspect the kind of support that I need, which I couldn't get from anywhere else, is that kind of support²⁰. You know when you have your doubts, should I have...

¹⁹ Being out is managed differently in different situations. Some situations there is openness but being out has to be managed by all family members and the power of heteronormative discourse is evident in when and what is seen as acceptable

²⁰ About managing being out and where support is from. Others know things outside the house but that cannot extend to knowing about his foregrounded gay identity and living with a male partner